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AMAZING STORIES

NOVEMBER
1952

... AND GOAL TO GO By ALFRED COPPEL

NOVEMBER

25¢



AMAZING

STORIES



Every lovely woman was a fragile toy
to this **MAD MONSTER OF MOGO**
By DON WILCOX

Walter Papp

MEN BEHIND AMAZING STORIES



Edward Leslie Stewart

I AM EASILY discouraged. For years I was discouraged by how-to-write-fiction articles which explained how this or that now-famous author wrote fifty-seven stories which were rejected by return mail, only to click with the fifty-eighth. Such articles, it is true, are not intended to discourage; they are intended to show how hard work and determination to succeed can win out in the end.

But I'm the kind of a guy who'll quit much sooner than that. And I have always had a morbid fear of rejection slips, especially in large batches. So for years I was strictly a

desk-drawer writer. An editor couldn't turn down a story he had never seen, could he? And I could hold on to my cowardly belief that I was a great and unpublished author. I could go right on teaching chemistry and waiting to be posthumously discovered.

Then I got married—right after the war, in the thick of the apartment shortage. There was nothing to do but convert my bachelor apartment into something less comfortable, but better-looking. My bride waded in and threw out half the stuff in the place. The day I was scheduled to monitor

(continued on third cover)

The Beast that Ravaged a million Women

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cure you," he said. "If you'll answer truthfully all questions I ask you.
They'll involve your most private sex and thought."

Hitler consented, but the doctor was quite firm and had his way. The book

"I WAS HITLER'S DOCTOR"

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takes his patient back to his childhood love of his young mother and hate of his
aging father, his early degradation, his entrance with the brown ideal, and his attitude
towards his nation—especially the wayward one he never understood to anyone else.
He brings out Hitler's young girl fixation, his case of chosen girl fixation, and
shows why he married only when it could not be expected of him to consummate his
marriage.

Such records are usually sealed in secret files for professional reference
only. But as he continued to meet his monstrous patient, these things dawned
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"Hitler flows into the madness of this age and

THE MADNESS OF THIS AGE

flows into Hitler," wrote Dr. Arvon Roland of the U. S. Army Medical Reserve
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NOVEMBER, 1952

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— All STORIES Complete —

THE MAD MONSTER OF MOGO (Novel—30,000) . . . by Don Wilcox 78

Illustrated by Dick Francis

The men of Mogo liked to sit down, lean back against a mountain range, and dine on flying insects. That was what our space ships resembled—fat bugs

TOO MANY WORLDS (Short—6,500) by Irving Cox Jr. 56

Illustrated by William Slade

Rag and Lydia Sherman went to sleep in their own world. They awoke in one both new and terrifying, where good was evil, truth was falsehood, love was hate

SCRATCH ONE ASTEROID (Novelette—21,000) by Willard Hawkins 70

Illustrated by Ed Emsler

The most vicious criminals of time and space rode the penal ship Verulim, the ship called "escape-proof" until Brent got a book from the library

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE—VIII (Short—5,000) Author Unborn 112

Illustrated by Ed Valigurny

When men reached the Moon, they found proof of a civilization long vanished and forgotten. But the caves in which they'd dwelt suited Byron's purpose well

STACKED DECK (Short—5,000) by Lester Del Rey 116

Illustrated by Ed Emsler

After space travel, the dictator will still be with us, reaching for worlds instead of nations. He will have the old greeds, the old licks, but new tricks

...AND GOAL TO GO (Novelette—11,000) by Alfred Coppel 130

Illustrated by William Slade

Football, in the new age, won't need the platoon system. The players will never tire, nor will they be stopped—unless you use something to stop a locomotive

Front cover by Leo Ramon Summers

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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

RANDOM OBSERVATIONS OF AN ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Concerning Manhattan Island:

To an untutored observer—say, a Martian looking down from above—this island would present a strange phenomenon. At dawn, he would look down upon a comparatively empty city. Then, as the sun moved higher, he would see thousands—then millions—of Earthlings spewed up out of the ground to pour into the buildings and man the controls of this Magic Monster called New York City. He would see these human ants overrunning the island, crawling noddily in and out of the buildings all day long.

With the workday over, he would see the same phenomenon in reverse: millions of workers emerging from the buildings to stream down into the ground whence they had come. Knowing nothing of subways, tubes, and tunnels, his report to Martian superiors would probably read:

"In the morning, millions of slaves are released from their subterranean cells to perform mysterious duties, the nature of which I was unable to determine. With the lowering of the sun, they return to their underground dungeons. They seem to bear no resentment against their masters—whoever their masters are—because they emerge and return with amazing docility and eagerness. Possibly they are some advanced form of robot."

Concerning Science and Glamour:

I have come to the conclusion that there is very little glamour in pure science; that pure science, in itself, is not of much interest to the public.

Only when science is given the treatment—only when it is distorted so the glamour element can be added by the publicists and the fictionists, does it become drama.

Television is a good example of this. The Miracle of Television, as a term, has already become a cliché, tossed off glibly by speakers and announcers, and probably accepted, with proper awe, by you and me. But does any of us really care about this miracle—the actual workings of it, other than the fact we can look into the box and

see Gloria Prettygams in a 1949 vintage movie?

Self-examination reveals to me the shameful fact that I wouldn't walk around the corner to have the inside of a picture tube explained to me. I do not know about or care about the unsung men who have brought this miracle into being. But I remember once walking ten blocks to see Don Ameche in a grotesquely hoked-up version of the life of Alexander Graham Bell. And I know no more about the workings of the telephone after I saw the movie than I'd known before.

All in all, our miracle workers seem to be an unsung lot.

Concerning Progress:

I wonder when and where the first Helicopter Commuter's Service will be put into operation? It should certainly come soon, as it is the only logical, and workable, solution to the transportation problem of big cities.

Copters, setting down commuters on the roofs of big city buildings, are about the only things that will save the modern metropolis. Already the saturation point has been reached, transportation-wise. Engineers have reached the end of their ability to provide commuter-transportation facilities into large cities.

Manhattan Island, the heart of New York City, is served by underground tubes for trains and buses; ferries for bus and pedestrian travel; bridges for anyone who can ride, walk, or crawl. The areas under the ground and upon the ground have been about used up. The only place to go now is above the ground.

Copter service on a mass basis would create land values by expanding the living, or suburban circles around great cities. It is not hard to visualize a commuting area around Chicago, for instance, with a depth of one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles, served by swift copters, bringing workers into the heart of the city in less than an hour.

It is far from an absurdity to believe that the superhighway of today will be, in reality, a short-lived thing—to keep our present pattern of life, we must go into the air.

—PWF

STAR SHIP CENTAURI

Edward Leslie Stewart



IT IS AWFULLY dangerous to handicap predictions of future science by using today's standards. Nevertheless, some standards must be used; as a consequence, today it is generally agreed that, for the most part, the stars will remain barred to human visitation except for a very few which seem attainable.

A hundred years from now men are going to look toward the stars. By then it is almost a certainty that the Solar System will have been thoroughly investigated. The planets will have been visited, some colonized, and adventurous men are going to want to reach out of the System.

Unfortunately their choice is going to be small. It is well known that the nearest star is Alpha Centauri. There is also the star Wolf, but some farther away. But both of these bodies are better than four light years away! How will it be possible to reach them?

If it takes light four years to reach these systems, how can rocketry hope to attain these stars in a human lifetime? This knotty problem doesn't admit of an easy solution. It seems a truism that the limitation on speed described by the Einstein Theory cannot be violated. Material bodies cannot exceed the velocity of light, 183,000 miles per second. In fact, gross material bodies such as rocket ships will have to restrict themselves to a fraction of this velocity. In addition, this velocity will have to be attained by a moderate ac-

celeration. All of these things indicate that a trip to the nearest star will take a great deal longer than four years.

Any hypothetical trip might consume almost a lifetime, including the return, assuming motors of limitless power. The whole idea of the trip does not appear very attractive in this light. Still there are going to be adventurous people who will undertake it, no matter how long it will last.

There is always the possibility, of course, that some new principle in science will be discovered which will negate the Einsteinian velocity limitation. Stellar trips might become simple. The chances, however, are against this. Just as quantum theory seems to indicate a limitation on what man can know of the atom, so the velocity limitation seems to preclude what men may know of the stellar system—except insofar as they are prepared to build what might amount to a "traveling planet", a self-contained rocket ship of huge size, with an ecological system all its own, comparable to a regular planet. This idea is not beyond the realm of possibility at all. Enough science-fiction stories have considered the idea!

Whatever results, we do know that Man will reach the stars once the Solar System is conquered. The trip may be long and tedious but some day a silver of metal is going to circle a sun whose remoteness stultifies us. You can't keep good men in the System!



The giant breakfasted frugally—on the bread supply of an entire city

THE MAD MONSTER OF MOGO



By Don Wilcox

No armament, however deadly, could stop this walking mountain. No force of manpower could stand before him. So the weapons of a world's survival seemed to be brains, boxcars, and bread

MUCH OF the world's trouble can be traced to the lazy no-good fellow who lies around all day with nothing to do but get into mischief. It was one of the laziest giants of Mogo who accidentally started all the grief between the Solar System and the Mogo System. He bit into an Earth space ship. Devilish carelessness. He was too lazy to no-

tice that it was a space ship, not some kind of flying insect.

That was the start of a chain of events that led to the complete destruction of civilization on the Earth and to the subsequent race between a space explorer, Captain Keller, and the notorious Madam Zukor, of Venus, to reclaim the scorched planet.

Faz-O-Faz was the lazy giant's

name. He was a shaggy reddish-brown fellow about a mile tall (the average height of the Mogos) and very dusty. He spent most of his time lying on the hilltop. His weight had pulverized the rocks into a nice warm couch of dust, and as a rule the ears of his head were as dusty as the ears on his ankles.

Four years after the destruction of the Earth, Faz-O-Faz still lay on the same hilltop, quite as lazy as ever, snoozing when it pleased him, and enjoying the warmth of the three Mogo suns. Growing hungry from time to time, he would squirt into the bright summer clouds in the hope of sighting a bird or an insect passing over. If he could catch a meal out of the air it would save him the trouble of getting to his feet and ambling back to the city for lunch.

A humming sound reached his ears. He raised his head from his folded upper arms, which served as his pillow. His lower arms were free for action. His eyes rolled about hopefully and suddenly he saw—

What a dainty little insect! It was bright red, with thin lines of yellow running from nose to tail. It was moving fast, all right, but *retarding*—yes, it was a space ship!

Now Faz-O-Faz remembered. The warnings had been circulated for days: *An Earth ship would soon arrive. Let no Mogo mistake it for an insect and crush it.*

Temptation flashed through the lazy giant's mind. No one would know... His arm twitched.

The little ship was passing over him. He reached up. He thought, could it be that there were tiny people inside? That was the claim of Gret-O-Gret, the great Mogo philosopher. They were natives of a planet in the Solar system, and were said to be highly intelligent. They should make fascinating pets. He'd like to

have pets. He'd like to have one.

He reached up, opened his hand, and extended his fingers.

Swiss! Swiss! Two blasts of fire shot out from the ship.

Faz-O-Faz jerked his hand back and put his burnt fingers to his lips to cool them. He muttered an oath. The little ship soared on toward the city of Forty Towers.

For minutes Faz-O-Faz swore, not violently, but lazily. Then he half chuckled. Clever little devils, spouting fire at him! Luckily he hadn't opened his fingertips to expose his fingers-of-fingers, or he might have lost a few.

Two huge birds flew over, obviously trailing the little red ship with curiosity. He reached up and snatched both of them out of the air and devoured them. Lunch over, he closed his eyes contentedly and dozed off, thinking delicious thoughts of the little people from the Earth. Indirectly they had brought him his lunch. He wondered just what they were like. He promised himself that after a brief nap he would stroll into the city of Forty Towers to see how the great Gret-O-Gret received them. If he woke up in time.

CHAPTER II

IN THE city of Forty Towers many prominent Mogos assembled around the outdoor conference table (which, by Earth man's rule, would have measured two miles long and more than half a mile wide).

At the head of the table sat Gret-O-Gret. Today he was in a rare mood. His guests from the Earth would soon arrive, and he was dressed for the occasion. The glass-smooth table top reflected the purple of his robe, and his jewels flashed in the sunlight as his four arms moved in rhythmic gestures.

"My compatriots, I am happy for

you to witness this remarkable occasion. When I visited the Earth, I often wished for you. You would have found many things amusing—yet touching. But now, before they arrive—”

Gret-O-Gret bent forward, his tone conveying the imminence of danger.

“—listen carefully. There are certain precautions you must take, otherwise tragedies might result from our carelessness. First, you must remember to speak softly....”

The Mogos around the table listened intently.

Their voices, Gret-O-Gret warned, would sound like roaring thunder to the little Earth people, hence they must speak softly. They must *not* pick up the little creatures, however much they might be tempted. Might they look at the little fellows under a magnifying glass? With care—yes, but they must not focus sunlight on them, or the little creatures would be burned into specks of ashes.

“You’re sure to be tempted to dissect them, to examine their finely shaped brains or discover their fast-pounding little hearts. No, *you mustn’t!* They’re not like the hiffle-bugs in our orchards. You’d never get them back together alive. You mustn’t even remove their clothing to see what they look like in their natural state. You’ll be curious, naturally, but you must restrain your curiosity out of respect. They are very proud little creatures. They’ll be wearing their special dress uniforms for this occasion.”

ONE OF Gret-O-Gret’s listeners found this incredible. “You mean these fragile little bugs, no bigger than our finger-tips, wear *clothing?*”

“Yes, indeed. It’s a very important part of their life.”

Several of the Mogos chuckled with amusement, and the questioner, Blug-

O-Blug, gave a cynical groan. “A lot of nuisance, pampering such tiny bugs as if they had intelligence.”

“But they do have intelligence,” Gret-O-Gret insisted. “That’s why I’m preparing you. And by the way, Blug-O-Blug, your voice is much too heavy for their ears. You’ll do better not to speak at all.”

“I’m already speechless,” Blug muttered.

“They’re coming now,” Gret-O-Gret said, catching a radio report. “Remember this is a tour of good will. The leader of their party is the Earth man, Paul Keller, the great explorer who came to Mogo four Earth-years ago. The unfortunate Mogo destruction of the Earth might have turned all Solar people against us if it hadn’t been for Paul Keller. He proved to them that the evil work of our infamous brother Mox-O-Mox, now behind bars, was the work of a Mogo criminal. He made them understand that most of us are men of good will.”

“I hope he hasn’t come to ask us to pay for the damage,” said Blug-O-Blug sullenly. But his remark was lost. At that moment the little red space ship sailed into view over the horizon.

It zoomed downward, cutting a sharp path between two Mogo heads. It settled gently on the surface of the table, cushioning its descent with jets of fire. Then with its mysterious power applied to emerging wheels, it glided toward Gret-O-Gret’s end of the table and stopped.

All of the Mogos, even Blug-O-Blug, remembered to breathe softly. They waited.

In the side of the little red toy with the yellow stripes, a dainty door opened. Tiny two-legged, two-armed creatures marched out, walking upright in stiff military formation. They batted in a perfect line, eight of them. A faint blast of music sounded from

a gleaming little bugle. A miniature flag was lifted, and the little creatures all raised their arms at once in a precise salute. They held their pose.

Suddenly Bug-O-Blug gave a snort of derision, and three other Mogos broke out in laughter. Several of the giants bounced up from the table and walked away roaring.

CHAPTER III

"**B**IG BOY" Hurley, the two-hundred-and-forty-pound lieutenant who had served as number one pilot on the long voyage from the Earth, stood at the end of the line, gazing at the Mogo giants as they reassembled around the table, and admitted to himself that he was a pretty small speck, in comparison—in spite of all that Captain Keller had said in his curtain lectures.

"Remember," Keller had repeated just an hour before the landing, "we humans and the Mogo giants aren't much different. There's good and bad in all of us. As a race, they're a little bigger—but not enough to give us an inferiority complex. Right, Lieutenant Hurley?"

"Right, Captain," George Hurley had echoed.

"The fact is, they're only eight hundred and fifty times as tall as we are. In the eyes of a microbe, if a microbe had eyes, we'd all be in the same class. Right, Hurley?"

"Right, Captain."

"They stand just a mile higher than us. What's a mile—to a space man!"

"Right, Captain."

And so the talk had gone. George Hurley had backed everything Keller said, remembering his own past contact with the Mogo giants as vividly as if it had been yesterday.

Now the reality came back with a jolt.

Now, standing in the line of eight men, gazing up at the assemblage of mountainous figures, Hurley gulped hard, not quite sure whether he was a man or a microbe.

But there was Gret-O-Gret—the nearest of the massive figures—sitting right before him—rising like a great statue of purple robes and peach-colored flesh—sitting calmly at the end of the table, talking. That big soft voice—so well remembered! He and Captain Keller were exchanging greetings. Keller, using the speaker system that had been provided, filled the whole vast glass desert, the table, with his careful Mogo words. The giants drew in closer, watching, listening.

One of the great creatures held his magnifying glass down toward the table top, perilously close. The heat blazed through, and George expected the Captain would order a retreat to the ship. But a single thunderous word from Gret-O-Gret restrained his giant brother. "*Blugg!*"

Captain Keller introduced each of his seven men; each stepped forward and saluted. George was the last in line. As he stepped forward, he heard Gret-O-Gret echo his name. Yes, the kindly eyes of Gret-O-Gret were beaming down at him. So Gret remembered him!

"You're a big wheel on Mogo," the fellow at Hurley's elbow whispered. "Now you'll *really* put on airs."

"I'm just one of the boys," George returned. That's what he had tried to tell this fellow Millrock before. But the thick flint-faced fellow had a personality that was slow poison. All the way from the Earth, George had felt Millrock's jealousy. "Can you understand the Mogo's speech?"

Millrock didn't answer. But George guessed that he was understanding it, all right. Millrock was supposed to

be an expert on languages. He stood stiffly, listening to the sounds that rolled down through the air as the Mogos talked.

"What's being said, Millrock?" George asked again.

"S-s-s-sh!"

Millrock was getting it all right. Hurley understood some but not all. The two-way jealousy was there, between him and Millrock; there was no use denying it. He felt the warmth creeping under his shock of blonde hair, causing his ears to tingle. He hated Millrock with an unreasoned hate.

He distrusted Millrock. He couldn't forget that there had been a mysterious murder, in the New Earth capital, shortly before the expedition jumped off. The young man who was to have come along on this trip as a linguist had been blotted out. Then Millrock, a stranger, had appeared the last minute, bearing papers signed by President Waterfield, and Captain Keller, lacking time to investigate the references, had taken Millrock on.

ALL THE way Millrock had overexerted himself to become popular. Yes, George Hurley had envied him his free time, for George had been kept busy at the controls. Millrock had been free to help Captain Keller with his Mogo language lessons. In between times, he'd gambled lightly. He was always tossing half dollars around.

A bullet-headed, thick-chested coin slapper—that's what he was to George Hurley's wife, Anna, the only human survivor of the Earth's bombing. The engraving was a good likeness of a good-looking gal (if George did say so)—and half dollars ought to be treated with respect... Such were George Hurley's reflections, standing in the presence of mile-tall

men. He wondered—did Mogos ever have petty thoughts?

"Lieutenant Hurley, the canvas!" Captain Keller ordered.

Hurley and Millrock carried out the order as planned. Marching precisely, they unfolded the sixty-foot canvas bearing an official invitation in black print—Mogo symbols and Earth words.

"It's a certificate of hospitality," the captain said in Mogo. The faces of the giants lighted. Keller translated each word, his voice booming through the speakers.

"We of the New Earth hereby invite Gret-O-Gret, our friend..."

Interpreted in Mogo, it urged Gret-O-Gret to come back to the Earth for a visit, and to stay, if he cared to, as much as a year. Or, if Gret himself could not come, he could send some other Mogo giant as a substitute. The canvas "certificate" guaranteed that the visitor would be treated as an ambassador of good will.

When Paul Keller finished, the giants murmured their applause.

Then Gret-O-Gret responded with a speech, expressing his appreciation. At present the great Mogo leader could not say whether he would make the visit in person or send a substitute, but he was deeply touched by the invitation.

His words were cut short by a rude interruption. A shaggy Mogo giant, passing within hearing of the ceremony, came closer, purring with curiosity. Someone at the conference table motioned him to go away. The shaggy Mogo shrugged his big shoulders, and a shower of dust sifted down from his ragged robes. He made a gesture of apology, and started to beat the dust from his sleeves. That only made matters worse.

"Into the ship. Forward, march!" Captain Keller impulsively ordered,

as the cloud of dust rained down over the top of the table, Big Boy Hurley winced. Did the captain realize that this might be interpreted as a breach of courtesy? On the instant, Keller countermanded his order.

"Halt! Attention!"

The Mogos were already doing their utmost to make amends, fanning the dusty air with their robes. Gret-O-Gret hastily cupped his big hand down over the Earth men so they wouldn't be blown away. In a moment the air was clear again. Gret made an eloquent apology (though Hurley couldn't understand the words) and the shaggy, dusty passerby, whom they called Faz-O-Faz, ambled on about his business, if any.

CHAPTER IV

NOW IT was growing dark. The three Mogo suns had sunk behind the distant mountains. The twilight sky was reflected, silver and green, in the wide gleaming tabletop on which the Earth space ship rested. Only Hurley and Millrock remained with the ship. The others had gone with Gret-O-Gret to attend the public showing of Gret's movie, a documentary film of the Earth.

Naturally, Hurley had wanted to attend, especially when he learned that he himself would appear in the picture. But the moment Keller had called for volunteers to stand guard at the ship, Hurley had stepped forward.

Instantly, Millrock had followed suit.

So the two walked about on the tabletop, watching darkness descend. Mogos could be seen passing at distances of two or three miles, for a thoroughfare ran past one end of the table.

Several miles away, along a hilltop, the Mogos could be seen gathering

in at the outdoor theater, their rows of heads showing above a long horizontal wall. Captain Keller and the other men were over there somewhere, occupying a special box seat which Gret-O-Gret had devised for the occasion—a balcony-like basket which he had fastened to his shoulder like an epaulette.

But Hurley and Millrock would be able to see the picture too, even though they didn't occupy box seats; for the picture would be projected on a screen of smoky white seven miles wide and six miles high, to be seen for many miles around.

Darkness came on. Hurley marched about the ship uneasily. Millrock was uncommunicative, preferring to keep his company to himself. He suggested that Hurley keep guard until the movie appeared against the sky, after which time he would gladly keep watch. He never cared for movies, he said.

Dim amber lights outlined the ship. Gret-O-Gret had promised that the light wouldn't attract any of the giant Mogo insects. But Hurley couldn't help wondering whether passing Mogos might not be attracted, even though that part of the public grounds was supposed to be closed.

In the event of an intrusion, however, a safety device had been provided. It was an electric warning button which Gret-O-Gret had said would scare off any chance Mogo prowlers. It had been fastened to the surface of the table, near the ship.

"Don't tell me you're not scared," Hurley said to Millrock, coming across him in the dim amber light.

"Name it," Millrock said, slapping a half dollar on the back of his hand. But Big Boy ignored him.

"It's a long way back to the Earth." Big Boy looked across the darkening sky. "But it's certainly not too far to

wonder what goes on back there."

"If a giant would walk up and put his arm down on this table, it wouldn't matter. We'd be peanut butter."

"I keep wondering about the kid that got murdered. He was to have been our language expert."

"Forget the damned Earth, can't you. We've got enough to worry about here." And Millrock wandered on. He moved curiously around the big warning button that had been fastened to the table. George followed him, heard him muttering, "Warning button as big as a washtub. Probably knock us off the table."

"We're talking into mikes," Hurley observed. "Our voices may be carrying out. Have you noticed, Millrock, practically any direction you turn, you can see some of those big boys silhouetted against the stars. I thought I saw one up close, over by the gate. Don't see him now."

"It's an awfully still night," Millrock said.

"Those Mogos have got ears in their ankles as well as their heads. They can pick up sounds along the surface."

"I know. I've read all about them. Give me a rest, Hurley. Go on and watch your show. You can see better from the other side. I'll stand guard over here. Go ahead, forget about me."

CHAPTER V

THE MOVIE was Gret-O-Gret's way of explaining to his fellow Mogos exactly what had happened on the Earth.

It began with a wealth of scenes from the old planet, which Gret had later secured from the film libraries on the planet Venus. Here it was, the Earth before its destruction. Anyone could see it was a busy place, highly developed, populated with the interesting peoples of several races—tiny

people only six feet tall, like today's guests from the Solar System—people of wonderful intelligence and industry—people who, in spite of occasional wars, believed in working together for their common good.

Next, the film shifted to the Mogo system and showed several shots of Mox-O-Mox, the criminal. As an act of spite against Gret-O-Gret (who had been given legal claim to the distant planet) Mox had maliciously blasted the Earth with Mogo bombs.

Here, then, were views of the destroyed Earth following the blast. Gret-O-Gret himself had taken these pictures, Hurley remembered, while cruising around the ruined globe in his big thirteen-mile-long space ship.

Now a picture of a white box flashed on the screen. How well George Hurley remembered it! It had been the gift of Mogo foods which Gret-O-Gret had intended to present to the Earth people. But, upon arriving, he had found no people, only cities in ashes!

Then people had begun to stream back to the Earth—little groups of them—Earth people who had been living on Venus or Mars or Mercury. The pictures showed their memorable conferences at the Banrab camp in Africa, where they pledged that they would reclaim the ruined planet. It was here, at Banrab, that Hurley had first found Anna, the lone survivor—and from the hour of their meeting, the storm clouds had begun to dissolve, and the courage of the New Earth had been born.

Now the film presented several of the notable personalities who had been born.

Now the film presented several of the notable personalities who had fought to give the New Earth its social and political foundations. Here were Captain Paul Keller and his beautiful

wife Katherine, the famous space explorers. Here was Waterfield, the first president of the New Earth government. Next came the friendly winged people, natives of the Venus mountains—the brave Green Flash and his mate, Purple Wings. And more Earth people—that lovable circus couple, Manma Mountain and Papa Mouse. And at last—

Big Boy Hurley, gazing through the night's darkness toward the flickering images on the distant screen of light, felt his blood tingle.

Sure enough, there he was, blown up bigger than a Mogo giant. His smile had a good two-mile spread, he'd bet, on that best close-up.

And now Anna came into the picture—the first bride of the New Earth, obviously caught in the act of getting off a wisecrack that took George by surprise.

AND FINALLY the big thrill of the evening; there was the little be-diapered bundle that they had named George, Junior. The first brand-new little citizen to be born on the New Earth!

"That's my boy! Millrock, are you watching? That's Junior. That's my boy! . . . Millrock!"

As soon as the shot faded, George dashed around the ship, trying to find Millrock.

"Millrock, did you see—"

Hurley stopped short. There in the deep darkness, Millrock seemed to be talking with a giant. Hurley blinked, trying to adjust to the blackness of the sky and the deeper blackness of the great opaque form that appeared to be bending down toward the table.

"Millrock, what goes on?" Hurley shouted.

Millrock might not have heard. But he was *talking*—talking into the mike—in Mogo words—and saying *what?*

Was he trying to ward off danger? The poor sap, he'd been taken by surprise and hadn't had presence of mind to sound the warning! Now he was stalling for time—but in another moment—*what?* He might be devoured. Or seized, carried off, never to be seen again.

Were the hands of that lurking figure ready to descend upon the table to snatch—?

"The signal!" Hurley shouted. "The signal!"

"No! No!" Millrock hurled back. "Get away!"

But Lieutenant Hurley leaped toward the big electric button that had been fastened to the surface of the table. He jumped and came down on it with two hundred and forty pounds of pressure, and the signal responded.

From all directions a warbling, gurgling Mogo voice rolled out into the night's stillness. It was like a big skyful of thunder articulated in syllables, and the sounds branded themselves into Hurley's mind.

The dark form of the giant shuffled about for just a split second. The arms reached toward the table, Hurley was sure. But suddenly the giant was retreating. The dark bulk against the sky faded back. Peavy footsteps like bouncing mountains thumped off into the blackness of the night.

"It worked!" Hurley shouted. "It worked! Whatever that darn thing said, it scared him off in a hurry. What do you make of it, *Millrock*, where are you? *Millrock!*"

CHAPTER VI

"MILLROCK!" Hurley ran around the space ship, shouting. "Millrock! Where are you?"

The horror of no answer bore down on Hurley. Had those massive arms swept down through the darkness and

snatched the guy up? Hurley had no love for Millrock, but he wouldn't have wished a fate like that for any man—at least not for any member of Captain Keller's party. His very dislike of Millrock, it seemed, flared up like guilt.

"Millrock! Millrock!"

He ventured out toward the edge of the table where the giant's arm ~~would~~ have reached. Then he caught the faintest hint of a moving shadow from behind him—the slender shadow of Millrock, it must have been—slipping back toward the ship.

"Millrock, where the devil are you?" Why don't you answer?"

The shadow was gone. Against the dim amber lights Hurley could see nothing. He had the strange impression that Millrock was there, somewhere, running away from him—avoiding him.

"What's the game, Millrock? Where are you?"

He started around the ship. Quick footsteps suddenly came from back of him. He whirled and collided with Millrock's fist.

The blow glanced off his jaw. A second blow sank hard into his midsection. He stepped back, stalling off the fury of fists, trying to read some meaning into the sudden attack.

"Millrock, are you out of your head?"

"I told you to lay off that signal!" And Millrock tried to throw another punch. Hurley's reluctant arms went to work, then, and shot out with a reckless intent. *Smack, smack, smack, thwapp!*

That did it.

Hurley gathered the fellow up and dragged him into the ship, and dashed some cold water over his face.

"Leave me alone," Millrock blustered.

"You must be outa your head,

sonny boy. Don't you know better'n to pick a fight with me? I might get mad."

"You didn't have to hit me with a sledge hammer."

Hurley glanced at his fist. "It's all I got. Be careful how you start something. Why didn't you signal me when that giant came up? That was our orders. Did you see how he dashed off when I jumped on the button? He was off, just like recess. . . . Okay, stupid, close your eyes and sleep. Maybe Captain Keller can make sense out of you. It's too much for me."

Then Big Boy discovered that he'd inflicted heavier damages than he'd at first realized, so he went to work administering first aid.

Millrock carried an arm in a sling during the remainder of the visit with the Mogos.

It wasn't easily explained. Late that night, Captain Keller prodded him with sharp questions for an hour. The stubborn Millrock wasn't good at answering.

"Did the giant attack you?"

"Would I be here if he did? What chance have I got against a giant? It was your Loocy that busted me up."

"He says you began fighting him. Said you were sore because he chased off the giant with the danger signal."

"Let's just say I was scared. Let's say I didn't know what I was doing."

In their private corner the captain told Hurley they would talk it over later; meanwhile, the less the party knew about it the better. Above all, it shouldn't leak out to the Mogos.

"I get it," Big Boy said. "We're here on a good will tour, and we shouldn't spend our time beating each other up. But what about the giant he was talking with?"

"Are you sure there *was* a giant?"

"I'm sure," Hurley said. "He was off like a shot. That warning—"

"The Mogo prisons are no joke, they say. But a giant gets one warning..."

CHAPTER VII

A FEW HOURS before the departure for the Earth, Captain Keller talked with George again.

"You know what I've been saying to you all along, Hurley."

Big Boy nodded. For months Keller had been bearing down on him at every opportunity, reminding him that big things would be expected of him by the people of the New Earth. His heroism of the past pointed to more than being a good space pilot—the role he filled so comfortably. He must look forward to taking on his share of leadership.

"Really, Captain, I still don't think I'm cut out to be a politician."

"I'm not suggesting the impossible," Keller said, "but you and I both need to use our good wits. We have some of the same weaknesses, you and I. We tend to be too soft—to let the other fellow take the advantage. If we always give our enemies the benefit of the doubt, we may make saps of ourselves."

"I shoulda hit Millrock harder."

"I didn't mean that. But I'm confiding something to you about Millrock. I know he's phony. I don't have him figured out, but I'm asking you to help me keep an eye on him."

"I still can't figure why he'd pick a fight."

"I think I know," Keller said. "He wanted to take your attention off of something he didn't want you to see."

"Such as?"

"The door to the hold. It was left open. You broke up his game before he had a chance to close it."

"You mean he was stealing something?"

"Two barrels were missing."

"Barrels!"

"Do you remember something Gret-O-Gret was very fond of when he visited the Earth?"

"You mean chocolate?"

"Just a little strategy of mine," the captain said with a smile. "I brought several barrels of chocolate syrup along as a gift for Gret-O-Gret."

Hurley gulped and grinned. "Well I'll be! What an idea!"

"Just enough for a Mogo taste, of course. Still, I thought it might be enough to whet Gret's appetite and remind him how much we could make him enjoy a visit to the Earth. I've given him all the barrels that were left. Who knows, it may work!"

"Captain, you're a genius. But those two barrels. You mean that Millrock—"

"I'm not sure just how it happened," Captain Keller said, "but the night we returned from the show I found you working on Millrock's broken arm. And I also found the door open to our supplies. Millrock must have rolled out a couple of barrels for the Mogo prowler while you were watching the show—though what his game was. I can't figure."

"He had to be a fast worker."

"He talks Mogo as well as any of us. Frankly, I'm relieved that we're getting away without an incident. One hit of treachery on his part could have spoiled the whole good will tour—but as I say, I don't know what he had in mind. We may not have seen the end of it. Help me keep watch on him, Hurley."

This advice was in the top of George's mind as the ship zoomed off into the skies. The gala farewell of the Mogos was real proof of intergalaxy friendship; nevertheless Hurley also breathed a sigh of relief. They were in the open skies again!

In the open skies! Crashing through universes of emptiness! On their way back to the familiar realm of solar planets!

Would the great Mogo leader Gret-O-Gret follow them soon? Would the invitation for an Earth visit be accepted in due time? Gret-O-Gret, busy with affairs of state, had come to no decision. Time would tell.

THE HOURS of space travel were counted off. Good fellowship was maintained. Even Millrock pretended to offer Hurley friendship, swaggering up with an air of confidence.

"I've been meaning to say something, Lieutenant. About that night."

"Well?"

"Damned awkward of me, humping into you with my fists. I hope you'll forget it."

Hurley glanced at the fellow's bandaged arm. "Okay, let's say we forget it. But I still can't figure you."

"Just scared of the damn Mogos, that's all. You know, a guy gets nervous." Millrock's thickset muscles relaxed a trifle. With a wide sweep of his good arm he slapped a coin on the table. "Name it, pal."

"Easy on those half dollars," George said. "You know my wife's picture—"

"Sure, I know." Millrock flipped the coin into the air, caught it, held it up and winked at it. "Here's a wink for your lady. She brings me luck."

He put the coin to his lips. George flipped the back of his hand and batted the half dollar across the room. Millrock stared.

"Say, you get sore easy, don't you!" He started to pick the coin up, then changed his mind as he looked back at Hurley. "Now you wouldn't hit a man with a broken arm, would you?"

Hurley didn't answer. Millrock left the half dollar on the floor and walked off to another part of the ship.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EIGHT-GUN greeting which the New Earth gave to Captain Keller and his party on their safe arrival echoed to many corners of the Solar System. Radio listeners on the neighboring planets were interested to know that the good will party had returned safely. Whether friendly or otherwise, interplanetary politicians and statesmen could well afford to listen to the broadcast of cheering crowds and blaring hands playing that New Earth song hit, *We've Got a Great Big Brother in Mogo Land*.

On the planet Venus, Madam Zukor, dressed in a red silken gown with a cape of white wingman feathers, listened intently to the program.

Madam Zukor was a native of the Earth—the Old Earth. The New Earth had not welcomed her. She had barely escaped with her life after she and her infamous brother, the late Garritt Glasgow, had tried in vain to seize the planet.

Poppendorf, the man who sat beside her at the radio, was likewise an Earth native, who had also made an outcast of himself, and could consider himself lucky to have escaped alive.

"They're dedicating a building," Poppendorf said. "It's their number-one skyscraper, twelve stories tall. They've saved the dedication for Captain Keller's return. They call it the Mogo Tower. . . . Now, they've got Captain Keller making a speech."

"Wouldn't you know it!" Madam Zukor stamped her cigaret into the tray. She rose and began to pace. She moved with her hest queenly air, trying as always to imagine the person she would have been if the breaks had gone the other way. Yet her mannerisms were tinged with the defeat and the disillusionment that had followed her earlier personal war with

the forces of Captain Keller.

She lighted another cigaret. She sniffed as the radio brought in the speech of Captain Keller. Her queenly demeanor could easily give way to a pout.

"More than ever we are sure the Mogos are our friends," the captain was saying. *"What happened once could never possibly happen again. The bond of understanding has been sealed..."*

Madam Zukor stopped before the full length mirror. Why wasn't she making that speech instead of Captain Keller? Why hadn't she been lucky enough to win that bond of friendship?

"Listen. They're about to read the inscription on the tower," her male companion said.

"Can't you see I'm busy? I'm thinking..." She trailed off into her private vision. She was a queen, an empress—yes, a dictatorial ruler. The Earth would rebuild over the coming centuries, and it would record in its history that Madam Zukor was the one who seized it, after the tragic destruction, and started it on the way to a new place among the planets.

How would she accomplish her purpose? How? How? Sleepless nights had been devoted to all manner of schemes...

Now the radio narrator described the building as the dedication took place... A graceful building, a tower of strength... A gleaming metal figure adorning the entrances, three stories tall, a representation of Gret-O-Gret... an expression of good will... arms extended down the length of the arched entrances... palms open in an attitude of peace...

They were reading the inscription: *"To the everlasting friendship between the good giants of Mogo and..."*

"Listen to that," Poppendorf bel-

lowed. "Not to all the giants, but to the good giants—"

"Well, what of it?"

"It's a friendship with reservations. Who's going to be friends with the bad giants?"

"Who do you suggest?"

"You."

"Oh, blast you!"

"Well, why not? If they've got a few hellish giants like Mox-O-Mox on tap, why don't you get busy and sign up one?"

"They'd be too hard to handle, that's why. Any more bright ideas?"

"It was just a thought."

MADAM ZUKOR snorted. Then with an explosion of impatience she said, "I wish to hell they'd say whether Millrock got back safe. Why don't they read the names of the party?"

"Here it comes. Listen. Captain Keller and his brave men—"

The narrator repeated the names over the radio, as they had been given when the ship arrived. The name of Millrock was joined with the comment, "Millrock, the linguist, seems to have vanished temporarily. There are only seven men in the group, but we assure you that all eight returned safely."

"Oh, fine!" Madam Zukor said sarcastically. "What finesse! He's gone and got himself lost. I told him to stay inconspicuous. Damn fool! I told him—"

"You told him to report by radiogram the minute he got back safely," Poppendorf reminded her, looking up from the radio.

"Don't stick your iron jaw out at me. I should have sent you. You'd do everything just right, I'm sure."

"I'd have gone if you'd said the word."

"You know damn well you're too

comfortable here," Madam Zukor said. "When I get that New Earth safe in my clutches, I'll probably have to pry you loose from that easy chair with a hot poker, or you'll rot in it, right here on Venus."

"Can I help it if you got all the ambition in the family?"

"Since when are we a family?" Madam Zukor snapped back. "Watch your language."

The door bell sounded, and a moment later a servant brought Madam Zukor a radiogram. It was from Mill-rock. He had landed safely with the rest of the party. He had plenty of news. He would come on to Venus as fast as possible.

CHAPTER IX

THE STUDY in the home of Chief Pilot George Hurley was full of photographs of the most popular member of the family, little George, Junior. His pictures were all over the walls.

George Hurley was probably the happiest man on his home planet as he made the rounds of those photographs, one by one, holding the real article in his arms.

"Look, Georgie boy, here you are with your Daddy, and here's a picture with your Mamma, and here you are all alone."

"All alone," the little fellow repeated, pointing to the picture.

"And here you are, in rompers. Here you are, in diapers. And here you are—well, you'll probably remove these pictures when you get a little older."

"Don't tell him that, Daddy!" Anna scolded, following them around the room; and their little hopeful, jumping happily in George's arms, repeated, "Don't tell me that, Daddy!"

How he had learned to talk during George's absence! George couldn't get

over it. When dinner was over he took the little fellow in his arms and told him the story of real giants.

"You want me to tell you how I chased a big giant away from our space ship?"

Anna protested; George shouldn't be making up stories.

"But this is the truth," George said. "I'll tell it to you exactly the way it happened."

And so Anna listened, as proudly as if she'd been there and seen it happen. George described the wide table, and the dark Mogo night, and the amber lights around the ship. Then he told how he saw the dark hulk of the giant hovering close in the darkness—and he did exactly what he'd been told to do. He'd leaped onto the big electric signal.

"And all at once, a big recorded voice began singing out of all the speakers, and it went 'Ka-woozie-ka-woozie! Keetle, keetle, keetle!'"

George animated his story by tickling little Junior in the ribs, and the little fellow laughed so hard that George started all over and told the story again. Anna thought that was enough.

"You shouldn't overexcite him, Big Boy. The books say you shouldn't tickle 'em in the tummy."

"Huh? All I said was—" and George repeated the Mogo words and tickled the little fellow again. Junior promptly demanded more, but Anna said no. "Big Boy, you're a first rate Daddy, but I hope you don't turn out to be a tummy-tickler."

"Bad for his nerves, huh?" George chuckled. "If I remember right, his mother had good enough nerves to live through the Earth's bombing."

The compliment made its impression on Anna. She gave her husband a kiss. "We'll never forget that, will we, George?"

"How can we? They've got your picture on all the new half dollars—with this same hairdo. Gollies, honey, just to look at you gives me new respect for the fifty-cent piece. By the way, there was one hird on our trip—"

The telephone interrupted, and the next minute George Hurley was talking with Captain Keller. In the screen the captain's face wore a worried expression.

"**G**EORGE, I hated to call you—you've had only two days at home—but you're my most reliable man, and something very important has come up. Could you come right over for a few minutes?"

"You'll have to ask the boss," Hurley said, grinning into the screen. Anna bent to the phone and said she'd spare him for half an hour if it was for a good cause.

"It may be much longer, Anna, but it's for a good cause, I promise you. Your husband's going to become an important man on this New Earth."

"If you need him to make a speech, he's already been practicing," Anna said.

"What's your subject, George?"

"The population problem," George said, his grin broadening. "What the New Earth needs is a million little Georgie, Juniors. Right, Captain?"

"I should think half a million Georgies and half a million Annas might work out better in the long run."

"Either way, it sounds to me like a lot of diapers," Anna laughed. "All right, I'll send Big Boy right over."

When George Hurley reached Keller's office, the captain's manner was distinctly heavy.

"I didn't want to tell you this over the phone, but I need you to make a trip to Venus right away. Can you do it? Is your own space flivver ready for service?"

"I think so. Something serious?"

"It's Millrock. As a member of our expedition, he was under contract to me for the next two years. But he's gone—he's dashed off for Venus on the Capital Liner slipped away with out a word. He's carrying too much information from this trip to be trusted."

"You want me to get him and bring him back, huh?"

"Hit the capital port ahead of him if you can—or is that impossible?" They jotted a few figures and came up with Hurley's best answer. At best, he'd reach Venus four hours behind the Capital Liner. "All right, pick up his trail and see where he goes."

"You have any special suspicions?" Hurley asked.

"Yes. It's just a hunch. He may be contacting Madam Zukor."

"Zukor! Ye gods. What's she up to?"

"You know Zukor. She wouldn't dare show her face on the New Earth—not if we knew it. But she's clever and who knows, she may have planted Millrock with us. His papers came from President Waterfield, who happens to be on Venus getting ready for the Interplanetary Conclave. But were Millrock's papers real or forged? He may be Madam Zukor's spy!"

"And we took him to Mogo! Ye gods!" Big Boy Hurley glanced at his watch. "I'll be off in thirty minutes."

"Good luck, Lieutenant. You can save your speech-making till you come back."

"If you need speeches, call on Anna and Georgie, Junior. They can both outtalk me! So long!"

CHAPTER X

"**G**IVE US your best table," Poppendorf said to the head waiter

at the Silver Garden, on the outskirts of the Venus Capitol. "On the balcony please. Overlooking the lake."

Madam Zukor, Poppendorf and Millrock followed toward the farther end of the open-air balcony and were seated near the rail. Purple twilight was deepening the waters of the lake fifty feet below, where small white boats moved along silently. Soft music floated out over the waters. Colored lights were appearing around the curve of the lake's edge, back toward the mists among the mountains.

"It's a swell view," Millrock said, settling himself in the chair beside the rail.

Madam Zukor patted him on the shoulder. "For my nice little errand boys the best is none too good."

"Is he your nice little errand boy too?" Millrock asked, pointing his thumb at Poppendorf, who ignored the question. Following Madam Zukor's lead, Poppendorf gave Millrock a friendly pat on the shoulder.

"Good old Millrock. How was it, a pretty rugged voyage? Lots of stuffy regulations and saluting and all that? These damned captains all have to be saluted."

"Is that why you didn't want to go?" Millrock asked.

"Now, boys," Madam Zukor said.

"Wish I could have gone along," Poppendorf lied. "But the boss, here, said my face would give me away. Those New Earth people haven't forgotten me."

"That's what I've heard," Millrock said. On the trip to Mogo and back he had heard an abundance of echoes of the earlier fights waged by Madam Zukor and her brother Glasgow.

"So they still talk about us!" Madam Zukor gloated. "We almost had them—if my brother hadn't got too confident."

"Yep, the lil' ole Earth was almost

ours," Poppendorf echoed. "Hell, the smoking, stinking ole hall, I don't know what we'd do with it."

"Easy, Poppendorf," Zukor said. "You never know who might be listening."

"Anyhow, once we get it in the palm of our hands—"

"You'll kindly refrain from such liberal use of the pronoun *we*," Madam Zukor said.

"We? Did I say *we*?"

"You're always saying *we*. The facts will show who almost swung the deal. If that damned giant Gret-O-Gret hadn't tipped the scales for Paul Keller, we'd have had it, my brother and I. You, Poppendorf, I brought you along for an escort. Don't make yourself out a general."

Poppendorf conceded, with forced politeness, "You're so right, Madam. At your service."

"Now, Millrock, tell me everything. Did you hold your tongue throughout the voyage? Of course you did? The forged papers—you had no trouble getting aboard as a member of the crew? Good. You saw Gret-O-Gret, of course?"

Millrock nodded. "He seems to be a great man on Mogo."

"Great, is he? Big shot, I suppose."

"They think very highly of him."

"Impressed, were you?"

"If you hadn't told me in advance that he was your worst enemy—he and Paul Keller—"

MILLROCK broke off. His two listeners had exchanged glances that warned him he was on thin ice.

"Don't get me wrong," Millrock said. "I don't lean to Gret-O-Gret. I'm simply mentioning that I'd have been deceived by him if you hadn't told me about him in advance."

"All right. We'll say you're too clever to be taken in by a giant's

charming manners around a Mogo conference table. What about the invitation?"

"It was a fancy piece of canvas. It looked like a big college diploma—"

"Never mind that. What's Gret-O-Gret going to do about it? Will he take them up, and come to the Earth for a visit?"

"Apparently not. He's busy with his Mogo affairs."

"Do they have affairs on Mogo too?" Poppendorf asked, but Madam Zukor talked past him. Her questions were sharp and direct; she meant to get the facts. She asked whether Gret-O-Gret had convinced his Mogos that Mox-O-Mox was the guilty party who bombed the Earth.

"Oh, yes. No question about that. The records showed it. And the films and the recordings."

"Films?"

"Gret-O-Gret put on a documentary movie. It showed the destruction plain enough for anyone. The Mogos are pretty sick over what happened. I think they'll want to make up for it with friendship to the Earth for a long time to come."

"That sounds bad," Madam Zukor said.

"Unless," put in Poppendorf, "we can make them shift that friendship to us— I mean to *you*!"

"Stop splitting hairs, Poppendorf. About this movie, Millrock, did you see it?"

"Parts of it. I was pretty busy."

"Doing what? Don't tell me they had you polishing the decks while they went to the show."

"I volunteered to stand guard."

"Of all the stupid—you *volunteered*? Trying to get in good with the captain, I suppose. Whose side are you on, Millrock?"

Millrock met the penetrating look of Madam Zukor's dark eyes. "I was

busy on a little strategy of my own."

"What was it? Speak up! What am I paying you for?"

Millrock flipped a half dollar into the air, caught it, and slapped it on the back of his hand. "Madam Zukor, you haven't paid me—"

"The hell I haven't. I've advanced your expenses—"

"You called me your errand boy didn't you. Ha!"

"Oh, now *you* want to be a general. Is that it? All generals and no army!"

"You've paid me errand-boy wages," Millrock said coldly. "But I've pulled a smooth maneuver that not one soul knows about. Nobody—the captain or Gret-O-Gret, or anyone else. If we play the right cards at this Interplanetary Conclave—we, I said—"

"Damn the pronouns. Go on with your *if*!"

"If we play the right cards at the Interplanetary Conclave these next few days, we can wrap up that little ole ball you refer to as the Earth, Mr. Poppendorf, and mail it to our Aunt Jenny for a Christmas present."

Madam Zukor lighted a cigaret and hlew a puff of smoke across at Millrock. "You talk big, General. What's your price?"

"What do you offer?"

Madam Zukor named a sum in Venus currency.

Millrock nodded. "That—and *this*." He held up the New Earth half dollar. "Not the coin but the gal."

"You mean George Harley's wife?"

Madam Zukor stared. She glanced at Poppendorf, who nodded with his eyes. "All right, General, it's a deal."

At that moment a voice broke in from the area of the bank of Venus ferns a few feet beyond the table.

"A deal, is it! Like hell it's a deal!"

A very angry two-hundred-and-forty-pound man broke through the bank of Venus ferns and came plunging

toward Millrock. Anyone dining on that part of the balcony would have recognized the light of murder in his eye. He moved toward Millrock with fists swinging.

"My bad arm!" was all that Millrock had time to wait. He made a motion as if to put it back in a sling that wasn't there. He ducked back. "Help! Hhh—"

The blow from the big man's fist sent him spinning back against the rail.

Madam Zukor shrieked at Poppendorf. "It's George Hurley. Get him! Shoot him!"

Hurley went after Millrock at the rail, heedless of the others. Shouts and screams sounded from around the balcony. Millrock started to climb over the rail, and might have plunged for the water fifty feet below. Hurley seized him by the shoulder and flung him back. At the same moment Poppendorf hurled his weight at the big man and toppled him over.

George Hurley fell, hearing the screams of "Police! Police!" Just as he struck the water, a bullet plunged through his side. He went down.

CHAPTER XI

ANNA LISTENED to radio reports all that week, hoping that she might hear some news of her husband. No word had come to her since duty had suddenly whisked him away. Her concern mounted into worry, her worry into a mild frenzy. She began to think in terms of direct action. "If I could only go to Venus!" she thought. "I wish the government would send me."

There was the Interplanetary Conclave—but no, she wouldn't think of that. That government had been nice to her. It had put an engraving of her in the New Earth half dollar. It had hung a portrait of her in the corridor of the Council Hall. It had written

up her part in the great Earth bombing and placed copies in the public libraries. But she must not overplay her importance.

"After all," she told herself sternly, facing herself in the mirror, "you're just a school girl who happened to grow up and marry George Hurley. Don't get to thinking you're qualified to be an ambassador."

She resolved to wait patiently for news of her husband. She decided that she would not bother President Waterfield or Captain Keller about her worries. She would not call up their offices and ask—*she would not!*

She called up President Waterfield's executive suite first. The secretary was sorry.

"As you know, President Waterfield is in Venus, preparing for the Interplanetary Conclave. Mrs. Hurley.... No, I'm afraid we can't help you. In fact we haven't any record of your husband's appointment."

She called Captain Keller. A snappish receptionist told her that Captain Keller wasn't in.

"If you'd let me speak to him for just a moment...."

"I'm sorry, he's meeting with a committee."

"But—but—" It seemed futile to tell the truth; on impulse, she plunged dangerously. "About my appointment as assistant ambassador I don't know whether I should accept. However, if Captain Keller insists—"

She heard the receptionist gasp. "Assistant ambassador! Oh, I'm sorry. Mrs. Hurley. I didn't realize—I'll ring Captain Keller at once."

Then she was speaking with Captain Keller, and it was some comfort just to hear his voice.

"Anna, I meant to call you. I'm worried. I've had no word whatsoever from George. You haven't heard?"

"Not a word."

"Ah—what about this matter of your becoming an assistant to the ambassador at the conclave?" Keller asked.

"You don't mind a little joke, do you, Captain?"

"I don't know how you got wind of it, but Katherine and I have been talking it over." Captain Keller was speaking earnestly. "In fact, we've sent our recommendation to President Waterfield. I believe he'll approve, and that means you should be ready to go to Venus on a moment's notice... Are you there, Anna?"

"I just fainted," Anna said.

Two hours later she gave little George, Junior, a goodbye hug, left him in the care of Captain Keller's wife, Katherine, and boarded the Capital Liner for Venus.

CHAPTER XII

THE MORNING after Anna's departure a radio message from the outer world made big news for the New Earth. *A Mogo ship was on the way!*

The message was an automatic call in Mogo language, which Paul Keller interpreted as "On course."

It sounded with clocklike regularity every six hours, gradually growing clearer.

"It's definitely a Mogo ship en route," Captain Keller announced to the press. The news started a wave of exciting headlines.

"GRET-O-GRET COMING! TOP MOGO GIANT ACCEPTS NEW EARTH'S INVITATION!"

It was welcome news for all who remembered Gret-O-Gret. But it was not quite accurate. A second wave of headlines altered the story: **"GIANT GRET MAY SEND PROXY"**, "Mystery Mogo En Route to New Earth May be Substitute. Communication Not Clear."

The radio communication was not entirely clear, but it conveyed the unmistakable message that the New Earth would soon receive a visitor. The governmental circles got busy and named Captain Keller as Chairman of Preparations. No one would know better than Keller what needed to be done to make Gret-O-Gret (or his substitute) feel welcome.

Keller called a special meeting of the Council, in the absence of President Waterfield, and reviewed the anticipated guest's needs.

"The important thing is to treat Gret-O-Gret—or his substitute—as a big friendly brother," Paul Keller declared. "He'll want to be one of us."

"I don't see how we're going to invite a man of his size in on our card parties and political rallies," the skeptic of the Council said.

"What we'll have to do is get a huge speaker system ready. That way he can listen in on all our business lunches and court sessions and Council meetings."

The very thought caused the Council to straighten with visible self-consciousness. Manners at once became more formal, and speeches that should have been made in two minutes were spread out to an eloquent five or six. Dignity and civic pride suddenly bloomed.

"He'll want to hear our movies and plays, naturally. But we know he could never bend down to our theaters without knocking over a grocery store or two. And that's only the beginning. We'll need to plant microphones all around and let him take his choice. Concerts. Board of Trade. Auctions. Religious Services. Schools. Lectures. Literary clubs."

Even the skeptics were impressed by Paul Keller's confidence. A Mogo giant must be a man of strong intellectual appetite.

"Don't underestimate the Mogo's interest in our way of life," Keller said. "I've hardly scratched the surface. He'll want to see how our factories operate, how our money is coined, how our plastics are made, how radios are manufactured, how banks are run, how newspapers are printed, how crops are harvested—everything!"

These abundant predictions of Paul Keller were to fill many columns in the newspapers for the next several days. Every phase of New Earth life would doubtless pass under the spotlight of Mogo scrutiny.

"I urge all citizens of the New Earth to be unstinting in their hospitality," Captain Keller proclaimed as the time for the Mogo's arrival approached. Remember the song 'We Have A Great Big Brother.'"

THIS WOULD be the New Earth's chance to clinch the ideal of universal brotherhood throughout the universe, he argued.

The reporters asked, "Is it known yet *who* the visiting Mogo will be?"

"I'm certain it is not Gret-O-Gret," Captain Keller said. "The communications have been sketchy. The guest has not given his name."

"You must be disappointed that it isn't Gret-O-Gret," a reporter said, "seeing that you and he are such firm friends."

Keller did his best to conceal his private disappointment. "I'm always glad to make new Mogo friends. Any friend of Gret-O-Gret—"

"But you don't know the guest's name?"

"Not yet."

"Will it be one of those who sat with you around the conference table?"

"I can't even answer that. The radio messages haven't been altogether clear. The Mogo is evidently not too familiar with sky travel. His naviga-

tion is far from perfect. But his references to our instructions on the certificate of invitation assure us he'll be here soon."

"Within forty-eight hours?"

"That's the latest," Captain Keller said, checking the radio bulletins. He wanted to add, "If he doesn't shear off a slice of the moon on the way in." But he didn't say it, not even in jest. He was afraid they might quote him. "Please don't mention that he's an amateur in the arts of sky navigation, boys. I'd rather say nothing that might arouse disrespect."

"We understand, Captain."

"Build him up any way you can. The fact is, he must have a heart of gold or Gret-O-Gret wouldn't have sent him. After all, a Mogo isn't to be judged by the way he operates a space ship, but rather by his—shall we say—*human* qualities."

The news writers and television commentators did such a good job of building up the expected visitor that, during the last forty-eight hours of anticipation, the public came through with thousands of dollars of volunteer funds.

They decked out the streets with gaudy decorations.

They decorated the park, and set up a new speakers' platform on the edge of the cliff, from which presidents of clubs could read addresses of welcome into the microphones.

Brass bands created special musical salutes. The New Earth Guard rehearsed for a dress parade. A civic committee planned a night show of fireworks.

All in all, it was to be the biggest reception the New Earth had ever given—for the biggest invited guest the planet had ever seen.

The big ship hove into sight at high noon, two days later, cruising over at a five-mile elevation. The whole coun-

tryside had turned out in gay colors for the reception.

The ship passed over the city, apparently on automatic air speed, moving at a good two thousand miles an hour. Instead of circling, retarding, and coming down onto the open flat across the river, as expected, it shot on.

Radio signals failed to bring it back.

"He never did see us," Captain Keller declared. "Hold up the celebration but keep the signals going. He'll be back."

"He doesn't return our signals," radio reported.

"Too busy Earth-gazing," Paul Keller said. "We'll just have to wait."

After that, the big Mogo ship circled the earth once or twice every day. The radios kept signalling but got no answer.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEWS bulletins from the Earth sent their thrill of excitement out to the neighboring planets. The Mogo visitor had come, as expected, and he was stirring up a whole world of curiosity while his hosts, the Earth people, waited for him to settle down.

"MOGO MAN STILL UNSETTLED," the headlines read in the Venus newspapers. And later, "MOGO MYSTERY MAN KEEPS MOVING."

Many of the interplanetary leaders at the Venus Capital were too busy to notice. The Interplanetary Conclave was on, full tilt, and problems were being threshed out for the peace and welfare of the Solar System for many years to come, they hoped.

But President Waterfield and his New Earth staff, occupying one of the choice diplomatic suites in the White Star Hotel, were continually watchful

of the news from their home planet.

"It's a bad break for our government," President Waterfield said, off the record, to his inner staff. "If the visitor had been Gret-O-Gret, the publicity would have been wonderful. Gret would have come in on schedule, landed where he was supposed to land, and stepped out of his ship to receive his official welcome—and the New Earth prestige would have risen enormously. It would have given us added leverage in dealing with other planets, to have a great big brother from Mogo land. But this—this guest—"

The President tried to temper his comment with reason, but his anger seeped through.

"This guest is doing us damage. Riding around the Earth and refusing to land, he's making us unpopular. My administration is going to suffer. People won't like it, getting a big reception party ready for a Mogo that doesn't land. I may have to make a trip back to the Earth to take charge."

"Can't Captain Keller do something?" an assistant asked.

"Keller has a plan. He wants to send a squadron of flying boats up to break into the ship. He thinks the Mogo has run into technical difficulty. A good idea, you think?" President Waterfield brushed his fingers through his gray hair thoughtfully. "If the ship doesn't land soon, I may give Keller the green light. He's had excellent success dealing with the Mogos, and there's no one can match him speaking the Mogo language."

One of President Waterfield's listeners slipped away unnoticed and walked hurriedly from the building. . . Words spoken for inner circles in the New Earth embassy on Venus had more than once found their way out to an unsuspected grapevine.

Twenty minutes after Millrock's pipeline into the embassy delivered

President Waterfield's latest off-the-record remarks, Millrock stepped out of a bar into Madam Zukor's limousine.

"You're on time, for once," Madam Zukor said as he sat down beside her.

"It gets to be a habit with us generals," Millrock said.

Madam Zukor knew by his manner that he had some news. She called to the uniformed man at the wheel, "Drive to the Silver Garden, Poppendorf."

CHAPTER XIV

AT THEIR favorite table Madam Zukor, Poppendorf, and Millrock flung swift bits of gossip back and forth until their dinner was served; then they quieted their voices as Madam Zukor reviewed their progress.

"Poppendorf, what about Hurley? Has anything come to light?"

The heavy-jawed man shook his head. "The last anyone saw of him was when he leaped over this rail and bobbed up and grabbed a motor boat. We all three saw the end of that. I went with the police that night, you know. We found the boat floating around, two miles up the lake. There was plenty of Hurley's blood on the side. Damn boat had run out of gas. Nobody ever found Hurley's body."

"We still can't be sure he's dead," Madam Zukor said.

"He was in no shape to swim after that shooting. I figure he was so heavy with lead they'll never find him."

"There's always a chance," said Millrock, "that he got ashore and hid up in the mountains."

"And died," said Poppendorf.

"You're a confirmed optimist, Poppendorf," Madam Zukor said. But she readily saw the advantage of accepting his thesis. It eased the way in

handling Millrock. "If he's dead, then it will certainly simplify paying our esteemed general his half dollar."

Millrock gazed at the engraving of Anna Hurley on a fifty-cent piece and raised a hopeful eyebrow. "Any day now." Then he pocketed the coin and listened as Madam Zukor outlined her strategy.

"We have a clear field," she said, "if we accomplish three things. One, two, three—it's as simple as that."

"One?"

"One, I have a date with the ambassador from Mercury in half an hour. The Solar world doesn't know it, but our little visit is going to make history. I've already written up the resolution I want him to swing at the Conclave."

"Read it."

"It's too long. But trust me, I know all the loopholes. It's literally stitched with them—for us. For the New Earth, it's air-tight. If they fail to come through with certain standards within a year—if they don't show enough commercial progress—they lose their rights to the planet."

"What happens to the rights?"

"They fall to us," Madam Zukor smiled complacently. "And that's what'll happen. If we succeed with tasks number two and three. Two is your department, Millrock. Your bluff was that you could bring a Mogo giant to the Earth who would upset all the New Earth progress."

"He's already arrived," Millrock said.

"Is he doing any damage?"

"Give him time."

"The newspapers," said Poppendorf, "refer to him as a friend of Gret-O-Gret. I don't see how you're going to accomplish anything with a friend of Gret-O-Gret."

"All I say is, give him time."

"THE GENERAL is still full of secrets," Madam Zukor sniffed. "All right, number three. When the New Earth people fall down, we've got to have our own colony going full blast. Not large, but—well, don't worry, I've written the specifications. Leave the rest to the Mercury ambassador. Our evening begins in thirty minutes."

"This colony you speak of—" Millrock began.

"You and Poppendorf are to get busy at once organizing the Wingmen, like I told you before, Poppendorf."

"We'll have to move our base of operations to the Earth before we get far," Poppendorf said. "And the minute we do that we're in danger."

"We'll go as far as we can right here first. Have you gone to the Wingmen Hospital like I told you?"

Poppendorf shrugged. "When have I had time? But I called and what I heard didn't sound good. Those jailed-up Wingmen have been having visitors from Banrab."

"I don't believe it," Madam Zukor said. "I've kept close watch on the Hospital news."

"This didn't reach the papers. It's the kind of news the Hospital would shush. But our mutual friend Stoddard had his own grapevine." Poppendorf paused, making the most of Madam Zukor's curiosity.

"Out with it. Who?"

"Our two old winged enemies—Green Flash and Purple Wings."

"Here—on Venus?"

"You find it hard to believe?"

"They were supposed to be leading the Wingmen on the Earth—at Banrab."

"They're back. They're doing missionary work among the prisoners—the patients, I should say. They slip into the prison—the Hospital, that is—and give the inmates ideas about re-

forming and getting free to come to Earth."

Madam Zukor looked from Poppendorf to Millrock and her face brightened. "Very well. Let them! What can we lose?"

"What do you mean?"

"We'll take over where our enemies leave off. Let them go ahead and recruit the winged rebels. We'll provide a space ship. They won't know where it comes from. You and I will stay in the background, Poppendorf. But Millrock, you—"

"I get it," Millrock said. "Shall we drink to the success of Green Flash?"

"To our old enemies, Green Flash and Purple Wings." Poppendorf picked up his empty glass. "We need a refill."

"Waiter. Waiter!"

Madam Zukor called four times before the waiter turned, apologizing for having been momentarily distracted. When she accused him of neglecting his work to star-gaze at the good-looking girls he retorted quickly in self defense.

"A celebrity—didn't you notice? She's the girl whose picture is on the New Earth half dollar. She was sitting right over—"

The waiter didn't finish, for Millrock, bouncing to his feet, pushed the fellow aside, "Which way did she go?"

CHAPTER XV

ANNA HURLEY fairly flew from the Silver Garden terrace. She ran down the steps, she cut through a crowd of diners, she dodged into the arcade at the traffic level.

A line of jet taxis, their air-wings retracted, moved along the curb. She swung into the first door that opened for her.

"To the Downtown Transfer—and

hurry!" She put a coin into the driver's hand, simultaneously stepping out the opposite door into another cab.

"To the North Drive, quickly, please."

She crouched down in the seat. The jet taxi sped out of the Silver Garden Plaza. When she dared to glance back, she saw what she hoped to see. The taxi she had first entered was hitting up the hill drive, wide open. Right on its heels was another vehicle—unquestionably one of Zukor's party in hot pursuit. Okay, she had given them the slip.

"Bear down, driver. North to the Wingman's Hospital."

"That's a long way out."

"Take to the air, driver. The shortest way."

"The Hospital didn't allow visitors this late in the day."

"You let me worry about that. Get there fast, and circle over it three or four times. . . Into the air, please."

"I'm hurrying, Miss."

The sleek taxi spread its stubby wedge-shaped wings and lifted from the surface of the highway into the air.

"Oh, George, George, George!"

The driver glanced back. "My name isn't George, Miss."

"I'm not talking to you, I'm praying. Oh, George!"

The taxi flew over the tops of the houses at the city's outskirts and shot on into the open country toward the bank of dark blue mountains. The driver throttled for more elevation, and sped like a bullet into the twilight sky.

"Oh, George, I've got to find you!"

"Are you praying to him, Miss—or for him?"

"For him, if he's alive. If he's dead—sure, then I'm praying to him. He was always like a god to me."

"I sure hope he's alive, Miss—who-

ever you are. From the Earth, aren't you?" The driver was glancing back again. "You look a lot like the girl on the Earth half dollar."

"Don't tell anyone you saw me, please. Please. My whole world may depend on it."

The sky was darkening. The mountains rose as if defying anyone who might try to pass. There was the realm of the native Venus wingmen, Anna knew. In their caverns the primitive winged humans lived beyond the reach of the lengthening arm of civilization.

Anna knew the wingman's fierce wild heart. He was a fighter—yes, and a thief, according to his own natural laws. Laws forbade him to fly over Venus cities, but he took his own chances. And if he lost, no court of justice came to his rescue. He might be trapped; he might be shot down; he might lose his feathers to the merchants (for there was always a brisk market in wingmen feathers, especially at the Venus capitol, where wealthy and influential women like Madam Zukor indulged in the sadistic luxury of parading in wingman plumery).

BUT THE errant wingman knew one of the worst fates that might befall him, if captured, was to be confined to the Wingman "Hospital" for "observation". There, if he proved hard to handle, he was classed as a dangerous rebel against law and order, and kept "under observation" for life.

Yet Anna knew, better than most human residents of Venus knew, that the wingman could be a loyal friend.

True, some wingmen (including the winged women) were so treacherous that their traits could never be changed. But the average wingman, like any average human being, followed the standards of his group. Superior leaders, like Green Flash, could do

more to stop the tribe from stealing or destroying than all the laws in the books.

Ah, Green Flash! How wonderful he and his mate Purple Wings had been! In Anna's mind the awful troubles of the past darted through in quick dark images. She and Big Boy would have died, imprisoned in a cave, if it hadn't been for the loyalty and courage of those winged friends. And now—was it true—what she had overheard back there in the Silver Garden, while spying on Madam Zukor and her party? Was it true that Green Flash and Purple Wings had come back?

If it were true, maybe they would know. Maybe they would be willing to help! Oh, George! George!

The mountains had risen high against the darkening sky. As the taxi sped along, Anna caught occasional glimpses of winged forms flitting down into the darkness, losing themselves in the wooded foothills.

Beyond a wall of trees, a clearing appeared dimly. Within it were several long low-roofed buildings. Anna's eyes could barely make out the bars that guarded the darkened windows. The only light came from a corner office, doubtless the quarters of the night custodian.

The jet taxi circled over, and Anna stared down at the roof.

"It's a well known fact that they lock up tight before sundown, Miss," the driver volunteered. "But maybe you know how to get in."

"Can you land on that flat roof?"

"On the roof, Miss?"

"On the roof."

Two minutes later the sympathetic taxi driver wished her luck, whatever her mission. "I sure hope you find George." And he spun off toward the city reluctantly, at her request. Then she stood alone, on the crest of a

tilled roof, looking at the stars, and wishing for all the world that Nature had given her wings.

CHAPTER XVI

SHE SAID the words aloud. Hoping some wingman might be within hearing. *"Anna Hurley is here. Anna needs help. Anna is looking for George."*

The hardest thing was not to cry as she said it. She repeated it in a stronger voice. Then again. It became a sort of chant. It took on a weird rhythm. It helped the words to flow out into the darkness if they came in a rhythm. It was the rhythm of a dirge, she thought, and then her voice was strange to her. There was a sobbing strangeness in it, and she refused to listen to herself. But she kept on repeating the words.

"This is Anna Hurley...a friend of Purple Wings...Anna is looking for George...a friend of Green Flash..."

A rustle of wings made her stop. She could see nothing—nothing but the deep purple of the night sky above the ridge of mountains. The lines of the tiled roof had merged with the blackness of night.

The rustle of wings!

"...This is Anna Hurley...a friend of Purple Wings..."

The soft fluttering of feathers came again, from only a few feet away. Anna's heartbeat quickened. She crouched low, trying to distinguish a silhouette of a wingman somewhere near her. She was suddenly startled by the screech of voices from the farther end of the building. Wingman voices! They cried out in a weird alarm, from somewhere inside! The inmates, screeching in the middle of the night!

Voices answered from another building. Cries and mocking laughs came from all directions. Inmates were shouting to their brothers on the outside. Something had been planned. Something one guard or a few would be unable to cope with. Anna crouched low. Did this wild outburst concern her?

Once the voices subsided, and suddenly, to her astonishment, she heard a Wingman voice near her. "Anna our friend!"

"Purple Wings?" Anna whispered dubiously. "Could that be you, Purple Wings?"

The shrieking voices from the buildings drowned the answer and for several minutes Anna waited. When the hull came at last she whispered again, "Purple Wings, are you there?"

But the voice that replied was not the voice of Purple Wings.

"Purple Wings will come when the fight is over."

The wingman who had answered her flapped away.

In the darkness Anna listened as the sounds of the fight subsided. A siren had wailed. Dashing water had sounded through some of the buildings. Order was being restored.

Now lights flashed on around the hospital grounds. The voice of the night custodian sounded through the speakers, echoing back from the surrounding walls.

"Gray Boy! Come back, Gray Boy! Come back! I've spotted you, Gray Boy! I'll shoot if you start to fly."

ANNA'S EYES swept the outlines of roofs, black against the floodlighted yard beyond. She couldn't see a soul anywhere—winged or otherwise. Had the custodian actually spotted a runaway—or was he bluffing?

"I see you, Gray Boy," he repeat-

ed. "Walk back to this door at once and give yourself up or I'll shoot... Are you coming?... I'm not bluffing, Gray Boy. These mirrors show me every hiding place around every building, and over the roofs as well."

The roofs? Anna's heart fairly stopped. He must be seeing her! There was surely no one else on the roof. She tried to rise.

"For the last time, start walking to this door," the loud-speaker boomed. "If you haven't started by the time I count three, I'll shoot to kill. One...Two..." On the shout of "Three!" Anna sprang up and started walking.

"Don't shoot! I'm coming!" she cried out. She took four quick strides along the rooftop, walking toward the brightest light. "Don't shoot. I'm not a wingman!"

"Hussash!" A winged figure flashed down from somewhere overhead and snatched her up. She almost lost a shoe, struggling against the surprise rescue. Her captor flew almost straight up, then darted off toward the black mountainside at high speed.

Bullets whipped past. Anna had the dreadful vision of being shot through the heart, dying as she fell. Once the wingman gave a sharp twitch, as if his right wing had been nipped by a bullet. He swooped downward, he dodged to one side, then darted down again, swifter and swifter. The blackness of the mountainside came up at them. The lights from the Hospital grounds were closed away from view.

With a strong flutter of his two great wings, Anna's deliverer came gracefully to his feet. He released her from his grasp and said, in precise accents, "There. There you are, Anna."

"Thank you, Green Flash," Anna breathed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FOUR of them flew eastward on three pairs of wings. Green Flash and Gray Boy took turns carrying Anna. Purple Wings flew close by, and at times she reached across to squeeze Anna's hand. It was a happy reunion between Anna and the winged couple she had loved so well; and it was soon to be happier still, for they were taking her to the cave where George Hurley was hiding.

In the light of a small electric lantern, George Hurley blinked sleepily at his visitors. He was not surprised to see Green Flash and Purple Wings, for they had been taking care of him for many days. He was not entirely surprised to see the new escapee, the slender, swift-winged Gray Boy, for the break had been carefully planned.

But to look up out of a sound sleep and see his own wife standing here in his secret cave in the Venus mountains—smiling down at him, running her fingers through his uncombed hair, saying "Hi, Big Boy, what's news?"—he just gulped hard and shook his head and said, "It ain't so. She *looks* real, but I know it ain't so."

Big Boy Hurley was feeling fine, almost! He paced the floor to prove it. He felt so well he had wanted to help Green Flash with the night's rescue expedition, but his weight was against him. Green Flash had refused to add a two-hundred-and-forty-pound handicap to his flight.

Anna nestled in George's arms and remained curiously quiet while the three wingmen talked excitedly about the well-planned escape. The part that hadn't been planned was Anna's arrival on the roof. The rest had been routine—two wingmen faking a fight through the bars, the cries of wing-

men from all sides, and the inevitable showerbath from a fire hose which they knew the custodian would turn on the fighters while wingmen on the outside broke through the bars of Gray Boy's cell. Anna's chant had sounded just before time for the signal. Fortunately some winged friend had flown the message to Purple Wings in the nick of time.

"But when you started to walk the roof, Anna," Green Flash recalled, "I was sure the man with the gun would shoot first and ask questions afterward. We were all lucky we didn't get winged. Right, Gray Boy?"

Gray Boy showed a boyish grin, shrugging his shoulders.

"We come good," he said, using the simple words he knew. Then as if to show off his familiarity with the language of his caretakers, he said, still grinning, "Shut up, you damn idiot, or I'll singe your wings." Purple Wings hastily apologized for him. "It's just a hospital expression the inmates pick up. He doesn't know how it sounds to us."

Anna was hardly listening. She was studying the guileless countenance of her husband so curiously that he said, "Whatsa matter, dear? Something wrong?"

Anna's answer sounded like a judge summing up the evidence before the banging.

"What a fake you are, George Hurley! Here I thought you were either dead or dying, and you aren't even sick. I thought you were lost, and I find you in the hands of the best friends in the world. I thought you were at least out of touch with current events and here I see you even have a radio. All the comforts of home! Now where did you get a radio?"

"One of Green Flash's friends picked it up for me the day after they

dragged me up here. By the way," George said, "I caught a newscast just before you came in. President Waterfield has issued a public SOS for the assistant ambassador to report at the New Earth embassy right away. It didn't give the assistant ambassador's name, but if any of you happen to know who it is—"

"George, I hate to leave you here in this cave. Can you get back to the Venus Capitol by yourself?"

"Huh? Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"If these friends will fly me to a taxi, I'm going to the Embassy," Anna said. "Duty calls."

CHAPTER XVIII

ANNA PINCHED herself while she waited for the elevator, and again before entering the Embassy reception room on the eleventh floor. "Is this me or not me?" she whispered to herself.

The receptionist ushered her into the private sanctum of President Waterfield, who embraced her warmly and led her by the picture window.

"Breakfast and coffee will be right in," he said. "I know this is unusual, calling for you so early in the morning. But things are happening fast, and we must get our plans together at once. There'll be a big battle over there beginning this morning."

He was looking across at the Conclave Hall where representatives from many planets were holding their series of meetings.

"I'll need time to dress and make up, Anna thought. 'I suppose you want me to cast a vote or something.'

"I want you to make a speech," President Waterfield said.

Anna felt herself grow pale. The pink light of the morning sun didn't

help at all. She glanced at herself in a mirror and saw that she was chalk-white. She thought of Georgie, Junior back on the Earth and wondered if he didn't need her.

"Isn't there a ship leaving for the Earth—"

But President Waterfield wasn't listening. He was already in full swing of his diplomatic battle.

"News travels fast, Anna. Fortunately I've learned about a measure that the Ambassador of Mercury is going to present today. It may be perfectly fair and honest, but I'm anxious to be ready."

All at once a flash of light crossed through Anna's whirling mind and she said, "Whatever it is, I'm against it."

Waterfield stared at her. "Not so hasty, please. I haven't even told you what it is."

"I'm against it. Do I get a vote?"

"Certainly not. But you get to make a speech."

"I'll make it," Anna said. "I'll have it ready in an hour." She started toward the door.

"Wait, Anna! I haven't even told you what the Mercury official is up to. It may not be so bad."

"It's bad," Anna said. "He got his ideas from Madam Zukor."

President Waterfield drank his coffee black while listening to Anna's account of her recent activities. He gave a deep painful sigh and drank more black coffee.

Finally he said, "Anna, they may worry us, but they're not going to hurt us."

"Are you sure? Madam Zukor doesn't mean to stop until she wins. She'll try every way short of war to win the Earth for herself. Did I say, short of war? I wonder!"

"No, Anna. They can't hurt us. We have a great big brother—a guest from Mogo. And, fortunately, he has

at last settled down for a friendly visit. I received the news this morning."

CHAPTER XIX

THE NEW Earth capitol was in its glory at last. The great breathless number-one news event of this bright Saturday morning was that at last the visiting Mogo giant had parked his space ship exactly where he was supposed to park it, and now the mile-high door was open, in the side of the ship; the giant was looking out—in short, Mr. Mogo was expected to emerge at any moment.

It was high time for the New Earth to roll out the red carpet and receive this great big brother with open arms.

Captain Keller mounted the reviewing stand at Cliff Park, high above the river valley. A half dozen city dignitaries surrounded him. The band played its brassiest marches, and the gay crowds shouted and waved banners.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, under the full blaze of the summer sun, when the long-delayed official reception became a fact. Out of the vast ship stepped the Mogo giant.

He was a tower of flamboyant colors. His outfit might have been pieced together of many chance garments, as if he had picked up whatever he could lay hands on before hastily boarding for the trip. He stood gazing down at the cheering throngs. Plainly he was fascinated.

"Welcome, friend of Gret-O-Gret!" Captain Keller called through the amplifiers.

The giant grinned. He glanced around at the city, at the distant hills, at the river valley that stretched away from Cliff Park. His feet were planted solidly on the clearing adjoining the river, where factories

were some day to be built. The whole wide countryside must have been visible to him as he towered there, farms and forests and mountains hundreds of miles around. But he bent his massive head and shoulders toward the crowd that was welcoming him. In his big orange eyes shone a weird light of fascination.

Captain Keller prompted the newscasters who were narrating the event into the microphones. Loud-speakers directed the interest of the crowd.

"The banner you see the giant holding," came the announcer's voice, "is a sixty-foot canvas calling card. This is the giant's official ticket to the Earth. This canvas was given to the leader Gret-O-Gret by Captain Keller on his recent expedition to Mogo."

The crowds cheered.

Later, when Captain Keller made a few remarks, he again referred to the official invitation.

There was deep emotion in his voice as he spoke the name of Gret-O-Gret.

"...this official document which you see the giant now holding in his hands, ladies and gentlemen, is our guarantee, and our bond—our certificate of faith. It is our guarantee that the New Earth shall not fail to be a *good host*—that we shall extend our unfailing hospitality to this friend of our great good brother, Gret-O-Gret!"

PAUL KELLER'S arms, lifted up toward the huge figure towering toward the sky, would appear in all the afternoon newspapers, and would go down in the annals of New Earth history. Interplanetary good will had surely reached a new high!

The waves of applause, however weak they might sound to the giant through the amplifiers, were the stout-

est token the crowd could muster to express the New Earth's intent to be the perfect host.

The giant was surely understanding. At least he was still beaming down at them with the curius light in his eyes. He bent closer, and the flowing many-colored garments reflected their warm glow of colored light over all of Cliff Park. Streams of dust sifted down from his collar as he bowed—and the bright cloud of dust hung in the sunshine like a steamy wreath.

"And now," Paul Keller said, "I shall speak to our guest in his own Mogo language. I shall ask him to tell us his name."

Keller's Mogo words "sounded through the amplifiers. He waited for the giant to make a response. The crowd waited. Keller repeated his Mogo question. "Friend of Gret-O-Gret, please tell us your name."

The answer boomed down like a ripping of the skies, like a collision of electric storms, like thunder shaking the universe.

The giant pronounced his name, and followed it with a long loud laugh, and when he was through, the echoes were still rocking back and forth through the valley. The crowd was temporarily panicked. The shock of the big voice had terrified many, who started to run in all directions, falling over each other. Clashing glass from the nearest building added to the frenzy. Most of the windows of the nearest factory had been shattered.

Paul Keller called for order. There was no cause for alarm, he declared. The Earth people must learn to expect a few surprises.

"The giant has told us his name is Faz-O-Faz. Let us do everything in our power to make Faz-O-Faz comfortable. Perhaps he is already hungry. We'll see. The committee has

prepared a breakfast for him. Let us now serve him his first meal on the Earth."

The activity had been prepared well in advance. Rapidly, ten dump trucks, filled with loaves of bread, backed into position at the edge of the cliff and dumped their contents into a wide chute that had been constructed for serving meals to a giant.

At the foot of the chute was a receptacle that resembled a wooden salad bowl. Built on a framework of steel at a cost of two hundred thousand dollars, it was as large as an ocean-going vessel, and as sturdy. The shipbuilders had given it a fine finish. Its wooden surface gleamed like the well polished decks of an ocean liner.

The ten truck loads of bread swished down the chute into the bowl, and the crowds squealed with delight. No one had ever seen such a magnificent bowl of bread before in the history of the solar system.

"The giant's dish has now been filled," Captain Keller called. "I shall now explain to the giant in Mogo—"

Explanations were not necessary. The giant Faz-O-Faz was apparently quick to get the idea. He reached down and picked up the bowl. He straightened, put the bowl to his lips and unceremoniously dumped the contents into his mouth.

Then he tossed the bowl aside, and it fell in a field six miles away.

CHAPTER XX

FROM THE looks of the giant Faz-O-Faz, no one could be sure that his appetite had been entirely satisfied. Murmurings on the speakers' platform from the several dignitaries changed the remainder of the program. These men of prominence had each expected to deliver a brief

speech of welcome. Now they were more concerned with making sure the giant had plenty of food. Keller ordered the trucks to load up with more bread and bring it on, but fast.

Within the next thirty minutes the city's entire bread supply was poured into the chute. There was no longer a bowl to catch it, but the giant Faz-O-Faz proved to have willing hands for the occasion. When the bread was all gone, his hands were still there, cupped under the chute, waiting for the rest of his breakfast.

Someone suggested that he might be willing to eat a few sacks of flour, while the bakeries were catching up.

"We'll try straight wheat," Keller directed. Whereupon, several truckloads of grain were carted in to fill the waiting giant's hands.

Faz-O-Faz welcomed the wheat, and munched contentedly.

"There, it looks as if we've found the answer to the food problem," Keller declared to his committee. "But we're going to have to do some figuring on this matter."

"It will take a whole year to raise another wheat crop," one of the key committeemen reminded.

"I appreciate that fact, Sanderson," Keller said. "And that's only one item. We'll have to do some estimating."

"And what about that food bowl?" Sanderson asked. "We invested two hundred thousand dollars in that bowl."

Captain Keller mopped the perspiration from his forehead. He knew that Sanderson was deeply worried over the events of the morning, and Sanderson's worries were contagious. A bright-eyed little man with plenty of bounce, he was generally level-headed in spite of his explosive manner. This morning he had remained remarkably calm through the giant's

orgy of eating, and the Captain knew that his dignity and patience had been an important factor in holding the welcoming ceremony together.

"We'll drive out and take a look at that bowl," Keller said. "Perhaps it won't be damaged beyond use. At any rate, our guest seems to be comfortable and happy over his reception."

Yes, Faz-O-Faz was at peace with the world. He had finished eating and murmured contentedly a few words that may have been his acknowledgment—the nearest thing to a thank-you that the crowd was to hear. He sat on the low, flat industrial land below the park, and rested one hand on the ridge. The people had backed away, by this time, seeing from his actions that he wanted to lounge down for more comfort.

After he had finished chewing, he cast his eyes about over the city. From a sitting position, he towered above it at an elevation of perhaps two thousand feet. He committed a slight act of damage, then, before anyone could warn him it wasn't the proper thing for a guest to do. He picked the slender steeple off the top of a church and used it to pick his teeth.

He tossed it into the river when he was through, and crouched down closer to the surface of the earth, spreading an arm over Cliff Park upon which to lay his head. The speaker's platform upon which Captain Keller and the welcoming officials had stood a few minutes before was now rolled to splinters under the weight of the giant's reclining shoulder.

He blinked his big orange-colored eyes a few times, then closed them contentedly and fell asleep. At the sound of his first deep sonorous snore more than two hundred windows were shattered.

CHAPTER XXI

"DO YOU think we've made a good first impression on him?" Sanderson asked as the helicopter party swung over the river toward the field where the salad bowl had landed.

"I'm deeply concerned about the first impression he has made upon us," said Captain Keller very seriously.

"Oh! Listen to our Captain Keller, our famed friend of the Mogos."

"Yes, I'm serious, gentlemen," Keller said. "It's too bad that Gret-O-Gret couldn't have explained more about us to this friend before sending him. I don't wish to be quoted, but I feel deeply disappointed over the giant's conduct."

"Well!" Jay Sanderson appeared to be suffering from a not too mild shock. "I was under the impression, Captain Keller, that we were welcoming a guest, not a menace. I had complete faith that you yourself would be able to keep this gentleman from Mogo under control. Are we to understand from your remarks that this morning's demonstration of greed and waste was not what you expected?"

"It was not," Keller said. "This guest is going to have to be handled. He's nothing like Gret-O-Gret, from his first sample of his manners." Then Keller realized that he might be doing the Mogo an injustice, judging on such little evidence. "However, gentlemen, we must face him with the same kindly hospitality we would offer Gret-O-Gret himself. In the long run, I'm sure it will pay."

"In the meantime, it's going to cost like hell," Sanderson said bluntly. "We'd just as well make up our minds to that."

"Have you figured yet how many million bushels of wheat he'll eat in a year?" someone asked.

"Oh, we can't think of feeding him *regularly*," Keller said quickly. "I'm sure he must have his own food supply in the ship. Gret-O-Gret would have prepared him at least to that extent. I'll have a committee look into the ship at first opportunity."

They landed the copter near the fallen salad bowl and for the next two hours they walked around it, discussing the prospect of undoing the damage. An engineer in the party estimated that twenty thousand dollars would put the property back in shape. It was badly wrecked but not beyond repair.

Sanderson spluttered, but he said, "Captain, that's a lot of money—however, I'll see that the committee swings it—"

"Let's hold off, Sanderson," Keller said. "Give me time to talk with this Mogo."

"It's a tough question, Captain," Sanderson said for the twentieth time. "Five hundred years from now our descendants may very well thank us for having the foresight to build strong ties with the Mogo world—who knows. A few million dollars spent to make this giant happy could turn out to be the wisest investment of the age."

KELLER thanked the sharp-eyed little business man for his loyalty and far-sightedness—qualities he valued as a New Earth leader. In his own mind, Keller was asking questions. Would the visit from this Mogo ever prove to be worth the cost, after such a bad beginning? But of this Keller was sure, he would personally need the loyalty of men like Sanderson and the committee to see him through to the best answers.

They reentered the jet-copter and lifted. Across toward the city they could see that their guest was still resting, sprawled along the side of the river, with one foot resting on the wreckage of the Athletic Club's new luxury yacht.

The giant was napping, but not too soundly. Now and then his orange eyes would wink open and closed, as he shuffled for a more comfortable position.

When the sun rose the following morning, the giant yawned, and drew himself up to a sitting position. As observers afterward reported, he looked hopefully to the chute, then cast his eyes about as if trying to spot the dump trucks that had brought him his meals the day before.

His memory for matters connected with food must have been fairly sharp, as the people were soon to observe. From his elevation he must have remembered that the dump trucks got their loads of wheat from the freight cars on the railway siding that ran past the grain elevators.

He reached across to the railroad tracks and picked up a string of three freight cars. (Wheat was spilled, the news reporters said afterward, from the tracks to midtown, across the industries north of the business district, over the tops of the new apartment buildings on Old Liberty Row, and into Cliff Park.)

He dumped the spillings into another hand, and tossed them into his mouth—though such a shower of wheat fell that many flocks of birds (also edible) were to be attracted for many weeks to come. He broke open the cars that were sealed, and when he had finished his meal, with characteristic regard for the sanitation of his surroundings, he threw the broken box-cars into the river, slight-

ly damaging a bridge downstream.

He scooped up a drink, spluttered noisily, brushed his lips with the back of his hand, and then settled down in the morning sunshine and went back to sleep. From all reports, the guest from Mogo was making himself right at home.

CHAPTER XXII

PRESIDENT Waterfield and Anna Hurley were expecting the bomb-shell that burst upon the Solar Conclave that morning after the Mercury Ambassador's social engagement with Madam Zukor.

"Don't let them think we're worried," the President advised Anna. "Even if they put the measure over, we're not worried."

"I can't be that deceitful, Mr. Waterfield—"

"But we're not worried. We have a big brother from Mogo to help us. Tell me, Anna—"

"Yes, Mr. Waterfield?" She was trying to keep her mind on so many things at once—her speech, and the uproar that was sure to fill the Conclave Hall, and the headlines—already she could hear the shout of the newsboys on the streets.

"Tell me, Anna, as you remember Gret-O-Gret, don't you believe that if the New Earth were in a crisis, he would come to our rescue—I mean if he were on the Earth, visiting us?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, if he sent a guest in his place, wouldn't the guest do the same?"

"I—I suppose so—I mean, if he could."

"If the time comes, then, that the New Earth needs new buildings—*fast*—and new highways and new factories—*fast*—we've got a big

brother, right there, today, on the job, ready to help us—"

"You're so right, Mr. Waterfield."

"Thanks to Paul Keller's foresight, they can't put anything over on us. If the Solar Conclave demands that we show two years of progress for every year we've been going, we can do it. Whatever standards they set, we can come through. We can! We can do it, because we have a Mogo guest right on the job, ready and eager to help us."

"Then we've not a thing to worry about, have we?" Anna said with a gulp. "Now that you've reasoned it all out for me, Mr. Waterfield, tell me just one thing. Why am I still worried?"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WHOLE Solar world stopped and caught its breath over the headlines.

"WHO OWNS THE EARTH?"

"CONCLAVE MAY DECLARE OWNERSHIP MUST BE APPROVED BY INTERPLANETARY DECREE."

That was the bombshell.

And the explanation for such a breath-taking proposal? Not Anna Hurley's explanation, certainly. Not that Madam Zukor and her coterie of power-hungry friends were setting up an air-tight trap. Not that the Ambassador of Mercury, along with a few other interplanetary loud-talkers, had been drawn into secret parties with the glamorous and persuasive Zukor! No, nothing like that!

The explanation was—and any fact-seeking citizen could hear it on the air or read it under the headlines—that civilization was about to turn a corner.

For centuries (the explanations explained) nations had owned their share of this planet or that planet simply by virtue of having taken possession—grabbing the land, sitting on it, and making laws to govern it.

Take the Wingmen. At the moment a section of the Venus continent belonged to them. Why? Because they had always lived there, and no one in his right mind would question their right to keep on living there, not unless he wanted to upset the peace of the planet.

There was a widespread Earth population on Venus, too. Lands had been purchased or procured (the explanations never used the word *stolen*) by Earth men from time to time as the migration came on.

And so it was with Mars, and with the satellites; so it was with Mercury, and with the lightly populated caverns of the planet Saturn.

But now (the explanations declared) it was time for interplanetary customs to turn a sharp corner.

The Earth, whose former life had been destroyed, was wide open!

It was waiting for new populations to come in with the will and the energy to build a new civilizations.

And who—who, if not the Interplanetary Conclave—who had a right to say what populations?

TRUE, A LITTLE handful of Earth people had already leaped in, calling themselves the New Earth. They had fastened their claim upon the entire empty globe. They assumed that, by virtue of being there, they owned the Earth.

They didn't, the Ambassador from Mercury declared. *The age of squatter sovereignty was past!*

From now on, this Mercury of-

ficial had indicated, every nation of every planet must realize that it lived not unto itself; rather, that it was a part of an interplanetary community. If this little patch of sky meant to thrive down through the ages, it must govern itself with *interplanetary agreements*.

Several high officials from Mars and a few from Venus had already indorsed the Mercury Ambassador's proposal. And how (the explanations asked) could anyone oppose such a reasonable principle?

From the first headline and the first broadcast, the idea made a big splash. Here was history in the making! The Ambassador from Mercury had uttered the most memorable utterance in all Solar history!

And what would this mean for the New Earth?

It would mean that its present government might be swept aside by interplanetary decree. An interplanetary committee should investigate its claims and measure its progress. The committee might well ask, what is the New Earth government achieving? Is it building new homes? Is it producing enough food? Is it expanding economically?

If the New Earth is not moving forward efficiently, it should lose its right to exist.

This was the theme song of the Ambassador from Mercury.

And what did the representatives of the New Earth have to say about all this?

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Solar System, I give you *President Waterfield*, spokesman for the people of the New Earth," the Conclave chairman announced, and Waterfield marched to the speaker's platform and faced his audience.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THE VERY fact that I am speaking here," President Waterfield began, "proves that the New Earth has been accepted by the other planets."

Leading up to a discussion of the plan, he pointed to the chart upon which it was outlined.

"Frankly, this is not for us. The time may come when we will be willing to accept something along this line. But not this. This plan is full of tricks. It conceals the hidden purposes of certain nameless parties who have personal motives. This plan could be the means of criminal actions undreamed of by the members of this Conclave. To approve it would be to insult your integrity and mine."

These were strong words. The listeners were divided in their response. There were hoos, there was applause.

"Now you know my stand," President Waterfield said. "But I'm anxious for you to bear from another citizen of the New Earth—the only person who lived through the great bombing—Mrs. Anna Hurley."

The next thing Anna knew, she was addressing the ladies and gentlemen of the Conclave as if they were next-door neighbors who had stopped in for tea.

She wished they could meet George, her husband. He was a great guy, all two hundred and forty pounds of him—and he'd finally gotten used to her calling him "Big Boy."

And she wished they could all have a glimpse of their little two year old, Georgie, Junior. Back on the New Earth, where he happened to be the first child born after the bombing, everybody thought he was a grand little kid—like all the other little

kids being born on the New Earth these days.

"But speaking of this plan," Anna went on, "personally, I'd feel terrible if you voted for it and put an end to our New Earth organization. You see this New Earth organization is *our baby!*"

The people in the audience were with her, Anna thought. Their smiles gave her courage.

"Now I ask you, if you had a new baby in your home, how would you like for the whole community to get together and take a vote to see whether you get to keep it?"

She made a forlorn face for them, and they answered her with laughter and applause. Then her voice grew more intense.

"Can't you imagine how you'd feel? The committee knocks and says, 'Sorry, friends, it isn't your baby any more—we've voted to give it to Mr. and Mrs. Jones.' You wouldn't like that! You know darn well it's your baby, and nobody's got a right to take it away, in spite of all the fine print they fix up in the laws. That's our situation—and I say if anybody tries to take our New Earth away from us, it's a dastardly crime."

Cold silence filled the room as Anna's words drove home. Was her audience still with her? She wasn't sure, but she meant to plunge desperately.

"Now I'm going to tell you something. If you're still in favor of this plan, it might be because you're not doing your own thinking. You might be letting some ambassador do your thinking for you. Did you ever stop to think, *who does the thinking for the ambassador?*"

THE AMBASSADOR from Mercury, who had been sitting snugly in the third row, suddenly leaped

to his feet. He cursed and shouted a protest. The curse was in his own native tongue; the protest was in the Conclave language. "Mr. Chairman, stop that woman! She has no right to speak disrespectfully!"

Anna didn't like his shouting. She made that plain by shouting right back. "I'm going to tell you—all of you—whether the Ambassador from Venus likes it or not. I want to say—"

"Stop her! Sergeant-at-arms, I demand that you stop her! I will not have such talk—"

"I want to say that this plan did not come from the mind of the Ambassador—"

"No, you have no right to say that! You cannot challenge the motives of an ambassador—"

"I'm trying to tell you," Anna fairly screamed, as the chairman and the ambassador strode toward her gesturing her to stop. "I'm trying to tell you it's not the Ambassador's motive, it's someone else's. I overheard—"

"Sergeant-at-arms, remove her!" the Ambassador roared.

The sergeant-at-arms had heckoned three attendants, who were already bouncing up the steps onto the speaker's platform. President Waterfield tried to push them back, and his gesture gave her the quick moment to shout her charge full in the face of the Mercury Ambassador.

"Believe me, I overheard Madam Zukor! Zukor is the one who plotted this business against the New Earth! Madam Zukor, who almost got away with the Earth before!"

"Lock her up!" the Mercury Ambassador ordered the sergeant-at-arms.

"Lock her up! the sergeant-at-arms echoed to the attendants. They pushed President Waterfield aside

roughly and stormed toward her.

At the same moment a fluttering of wings sounded from the balcony, and a brilliant flash of purple suddenly shot down through the room, under the lights of the big chandelier, across to the speaker's platform.

"Purple Wings!" Anna cried. Impulsively she went into the winged girl's arms.

"Come! I need you!" Purple Wings' low-spoken words were the only sound in the deathly silent room in that instant. Anna was in her arms, then, and Purple Wings leaped into the air, beating her wings. She flew past the chandelier, up toward the corner of the gallery.

Attendants rushed toward the stairs, and the chairman, rapping his gavel, ordered Anna to come back. But Anna was with Purple Wings. The window was open, and a moment later they were up in the sunlit air, flying over the tops of buildings.

CHAPTER XXV

PURPLE WINGS landed on a rooftop to catch her breath. There was an inviting shadow down one of the sloping sides. Together they hovered in silence, listening for the sounds of pursuers. Apparently they were safe.

"You can't take me any farther," Anna said. "I'm too much for your wings. What's it all about, anyway? Did you think I was in danger?"

"Not you, but George, your mate," Purple Wings panted. "So I come for you."

"Oh, it's George! I thought he would be coming back."

"I hope he will be." Purple Wings' low voice was full of fear. "I have so much to tell you, Anna. But first, can you learn whether your mate has returned to his space ship?"

Purple Wings, with daring born of desperation, carried Anna down to a nearby shop, and there Anna called the space port. It took only a moment to learn that George Hurley's space flivver was there, untouched. "Mr. Hurley has not reported back since his arrival," the attendant said.

"Then he didn't escape the fight," Purple Wings said to Anna. "He couldn't have. And there was no chance that he could win against six such men."

"Where will we find him?"

"The one chance—the Wingman Hospital."

They hired a jet taxi and flew northward over the roofs and over the fields, toward the wingmen's mountains.

Anna, bewildered by everything her winged companion had said and done, was gratified, at last, to learn what had happened. Purple Wings, in her quiet and beautiful way, talked as they rode to the hospital.

"My spy, Limpy Lady, has always kept track of Madam Zukor for me," Purple Wings said. Limpy Lady, she explained, was a loyal friend who had been crippled by gunfire when a child; whose prettiness together with her injured wing won her the sympathy of people who otherwise might have suspected her. She had been highly successful, thus far, at keeping tab on Madam Zukor. It was through Limpy Lady that Green Flash had quickly learned of George Hurley's accident at the Silver Garden, and had come to his rescue with first aid, and helped him hide in the mountains.

"The night we rescued you from the hospital roof," Purple Wings said, "Limpy Lady stayed to keep an eye on the night watchman who had threatened you. Very soon, the night man had company. A young Doctor

Millrock. Do you know him?"

"I've seen him," Anna said. "He's not a doctor."

"Then he was pretending. That was what Limpy Lady thought as she overheard the bargain."

"Bargain?"

"Doctor Millrock offered to purchase all of the most troublesome inmates for a low sum. He said he would take them to the Earth immediately, to be used in his scientific experiments."

"**H**E WANTED them for colonists, for Madam Zukor," Anna said. "Did he succeed?"

"They called the manager before daybreak, and there was lots of calling to other officials. It was being arranged. Meanwhile, Limpy Lady spied on the doctor as he talked to the inmates through the bars. They were in favor, naturally, for it meant a trip to the Earth, and freedom—exactly what Green Flash and I have been trying to accomplish for them. They began telling the young doctor about Green Flash, and said that he must be allowed to go along as their leader. Doctor Millrock was quick to ask them where he would find Green Flash."

"To get him out of the way, I suppose."

"Yes. And when he learned that Green Flash was at the cave of your mate, dressing his wound, the young doctor hurried out to his companions. Now that they knew where the cave was, they flew to it in their jet-copter. There were six of them. Limpy Lady knew there would be danger for your mate, and for mine, so she came to me."

"And you came to me?" Anna asked.

"I first flew to the mountain cave. I did not find anyone there. The jet-

copter had already come and gone."

"So they got Big Boy and Green Flash! Where would they be now?"

"They would come back to the hospital, where wingmen were to be loaded into a ship for the Earth."

"You think they would take Green Flash and Big Boy along with their load of inmates?"

"I think they would soon kill both your mate and mine. But Limpy Lady was sure Madam Zukor had commanded that they both be brought back to the hospital alive. If so, we may find them there, being loaded into the ship."

They neared the Wingman Hospital in time to see a space ship blasting off into the sky.

Near the place where the shop had stood for loading, they found the body of Limpy Lady. She would not be able to tell them whether their mates were Earth-bound on the departing ship, or whether they had been disposed of somewhere in the mountains—for Limpy Lady had been shot through the heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RADIOGRAM from Venus was waiting for Captain Keller when he returned home at midnight from a meeting with his "Mogo committee."

He picked up the yellow envelope. It had been opened. His good wife Katherine would have called him during the committee meeting if she had thought it advisable. Better that he should get that difficult session over before seeing this communication from President Waterfield.

He dropped wearily into his favorite chair, after first removing a child's toy. These days Katherine was having such a wonderful time keeping little two-year-old Georgie Hur-

ley that children's toys might be found anywhere.

Tall and graceful and neat in her blue robe, Katherine brought in a tray of hot coffee, and as always after a wearying day, he commented to himself on her good looks.

"Have you read the radiogram?" Katherine asked.

He unfolded the yellow paper. It was a hundred-word message from President Waterfield.

"...Sorry to report that we are losing our fight against the Interplanetary Control measure...doubt that we can really votes enough to offset the strength of Mercury Ambassador... Therefore advise that you inform our Mogo guest of our situation and accept any assistance he offers. His help in construction of buildings, bridges, railroads, airfields, etc., will be of inestimable value... Glad he can be with us through this crisis, thanks to your foresight. Sincerely, President Waterfield."

"Thanks to my foresight, he says!" Paul Keller said. "That's a laugh!"

Katherine said, "And that phrase, 'Accept any assistance the Mogo offers'—I like that!"

She nestled down in the chair with him, and waited for him to tell her the coffee was just right. He drank it absent-mindedly.

"I can't understand Gret-O-Gret's choosing such a fellow as Fáz-O-Faz. Things are getting worse instead of better. It will take the city ten years just to pay for broken window glass."

"The New Earth can't afford it, Paul," Katherine said. "Just when we're getting well started, rebuilding and planning and saving for next year. Any new damages today?"

"Six freight cars."

"Wheat?"

"Wheat and oats."

"Any signs that he's beginning to 'feel his oats,' as they say?"

"Not yet. He hasn't moved. He just lies there against the warm cliff in the sun, eating and sleeping, drinking out of the river."

"He'll move off to another location one of these days."

"I hope so! That's what worries the committee. They still don't mind our having a Mogo giant for a guest if we could only make him respond with a few ordinary courtesies. We've already spent hours discussing ways to get him to move."

"Just so he doesn't move onto the city instead of away from it. Lots of people say they haven't slept a wink since he came. Even if he didn't mean any harm, he could crush a whole suburb with one false motion of his elbow."

"He's playing havoc with our food situation," Keller confessed. "We're having to route the grains away from him. Still, we provide him with a few box cars each day. If he reached down for his meal and picked up nothing but empty cars, who knows, he might tear up the tracks."

"What about his space ship?" Katherine asked. "Did he bring along his own supply of food concentrates?"

"**WE** DOUBT it. Helicopters have made the rounds of the ship several times, trying to get a line on what it contains. No one has been able to break in, but the appearances are that Fáz-O-Faz made the trip without adequate preparation."

"I don't understand it," Katherine said. "You'd have thought Gret-O-Gret would have taken great care to put your invitation in the hands of the right friend. If this fellow weren't so everlastingly lazy, you know, he

could make himself mighty popular."

"Especially with this threat from the Interplanetary Conclave coming up! You know, our New Earth may be hard pressed to show that we're making any progress whatever, under the present conditions."

"Progress! We're hacksliding. Our building program is at a standstill. Our food reserves have almost run out. And all those factories we were planning—what happened to them?"

"Faz-O-Faz is sitting on the sites," Paul Keller said.

"He's a dope."

"Careful. You're talking about our guest."

"He's a dope. The New Earth has got to move him off his reservation somehow, Paul. By now everyone knows he's a mistake, whether we admit it or not. By the way, what's happened to the Mogo Tower?"

"No work had been done on it lately," Paul admitted. "The fact is, Faz-O-Faz took a fancy to the brass figure of Gret-O-Gret over the entrance."

"Damage it?"

"Just removed it from the building. Is all. The whole facade is ruined."

Katherine idly picked up the radiogram and read it through again, shaking her head. "Paul, if they should get together and pass this measure, our New Earth would have to prove we're building up rapidly. The way they've set up the measure, actually a colony of Wingmen might make a better showing than the New Earth."

Keller knew only too well. That was the trick of the percentage basis. A New Earth city of two thousand homes couldn't expect to build another thousand in a year, to report a fifty percent gain. But a wingman community of ten jungle huts might build another ten in a week—and thus be able to report a hundred per-

cent gain. The cards were neatly stacked against the New Earth.

"Not that we wouldn't be glad to build at many times our present rate. Think of it, Katherine, if we had someone like Gret-O-Gret here to help us—"

"What we have is Faz-O-Faz," Katherine said. "There's a world of difference."

"Faz-O-Faz!"

"You've tried to talk with him?"

"Till I'm black in the face."

"What does he say?"

"He yawns."

The automatic bell sounded for another radiogram, and a moment later Paul and Katherine knew what the New Earth must soon know. The Mercury Ambassador's measure had been passed by the Interplanetary Conclave.

CHAPTER XXVII

MANY BLACK days followed for the New Earth. The fine enthusiasm that had once prevailed across the land was quenched in a storm of descending doom. People met in little groups, ostensibly to try to find their way out of their growing difficulties; but more often than not they only increased their apprehensions.

Nobody whistled the song "We've Got a Great Big Brother in Mogo Land."

Nobody wrote letters of praise to the newspapers concerning the officials of the New Earth government, lauding their wisdom and their foresight in making friends with the giants of a far-off world.

It was to the credit of President Waterfield and Captain Keller that the whole New Earth did not stir up a popular revolt. The few such tendencies were talked down by the people themselves.

"We know Captain Keller and President Waterfield," they said, in effect, "and we haven't forgot how they brought us through bad times before. We'll not be deceived into misjudging their motives. We'll stick by them."

Captain Keller wished President Waterfield would return from Venus to handle the crisis personally. But in the President's absence, Keller did what he thought best. He called for mass meetings in every town for the purpose of discussing remedies for the impending catastrophe.

All persons were urged to present their ideas, in speeches or in writing. Every citizen of the New Earth must know that he had a voice.

Plans for dealing with the big sleeping brute from Mogo rolled in by the thousands.

Plans for meeting the emergency created by the new Conclave law were also offered.

The Mogo Emergency plans ranged from complete kindness to swift and final destruction. "Keep talking to him." "Explain in words of one syllable that he is making himself unpleasant. In time he'll understand." "Send back to the Mogo System and ask Gret-O-Gret what to do." "Coax him away from the Venus capitol with food... Plant a trail of his favorite delicacies. He'll follow... Then keep feeding him at a safe distance..."

Those were some of the milder proposals. At the other extreme were proposals to poison him, to bind him with steel cables and move him across the continent to the ocean and dump him in (the engineers who had calculated his weight and size smiled at the impossibility of such a feat) — and proposals to give him a thoroughgoing atom-bomb treatment.

Captain Keller issued a public statement: "We urge you not to sub-

mit plans involving personal harm to Faz-O-Faz. As all of us know, he himself could work unspeakable damage to our civilization if he were inclined to be malicious. He is not malicious. He does not intentionally destroy or harm us. The worst we can say about him is that he is inclined to be indolent and thoughtless, in the best tradition of a guest who makes himself comfortable away from home. Accordingly, we must use no destructive tactics. We must rely upon the weapons of a good host—diplomacy and tact. We must treat him as a guest who fails to take a hint. We must use our wits to the utmost."

AS TO THE other group of plans which the public submitted—those dealing with the problem of the Conclave Act—they likewise ranged from the soft answers of soft-hearted men to the bristling proposals of violence from men of anger.

"If the Interplanetary Conclave, in its wisdom, has asked us to prove our right to exist, let us redouble our efforts toward efficient living. Let us build more diligently, educate our children more earnestly, and pray more fervently."

This answer, signed by a group of sincere professional men, found its contrast in the statement submitted by officers of the Guard.

"We defy the Interplanetary Conclave or any other damned gang to tell us we don't own the Earth. We're here *firstest* and we're going to be here *lastest*, and there's no force in the whole damned sky big enough to chase us off. If they think so, let them try."

Jay Sanderson was waiting for Captain Keller when he came home after a late night of parleying with committees. Keller entered the living

room to find him sitting by a lighted candle.

"My apologies for not calling for an appointment, Captain. The power's off, all over this end of town. Your good wife invited me in and lighted up for me with an old-fashioned candle. I guess you knew about the lines' being broken."

"They're working on it," Keller said. "Luckily, no one was hurt. It happened when Faz-O-Faz reached into a warehouse basement. He has a mania for barrels, you know, and that's what he was breaking open—barrels of pickles—barrels of salt—even kegs of nails. He didn't eat the nails, at least. But he kept tearing open the basement and his fingers went on back and broke into the utilities tunnel."

"All in the day's work, I suppose," Sanderson said, and then he exploded with, "No, by God, it isn't, Captain. We'll never get used to living like this and by God I came here to tell you it's got to stop."

"Well, Sanderson—"

"Either you're going to put an end to this damnable terror—you and Waterfield—or by the heavens I'll open a revolt against both of you. The way things are going, Keller, we'll be bowing down to Madam Zukor and company in a few more weeks. You and President Waterfield had better act fast. We've been back of you, you know that damn well. But I'm not the man to stand by and see our New Earth go to pot."

"Give us a little more time, Sanderson."

"You've had time enough. I could have been rallying all the angry people up and down the streets to march on you in a mob. I didn't do it. I've come to you instead."

"Give us a little more time. You've no idea how I'm trying to bold all

the forces together, and how much Waterfield is doing on Venus. They have our fate in their hands, up there in the Conclave."

"And the Mogo giant has us in his hands too, damn it. Look, here we sit by candlelight. Lights and communication knocked out. Food shortage. Schools afraid to open for fear the kids might all get stepped on at once. Railroad service tied up. Bridges out. Trucks running around in crazy detours trying to keep out of reach—all for what? For a lazy Mogo guest that lies in the sun, and eats and sleeps and snores till the city can't hear itself think. Which do we move, Keller, the giant or the city?"

"I wish I could make contact with Lieutenant Hurley," Keller said.

"Not too loud," his wife warned. She had just succeeded in tucking little Georgie. Junior away for the night. "He keeps asking for his daddy and his mamma."

"They both gone?" Sanderson asked.

"Both were last seen on Venus—on errands related to the big trouble. They both disappeared one day. Waterfield keeps ordering the Venus constabulary to trace them. But you know the Venus police." Keller paused, realizing that Sanderson was looking through him, seeing him as a leader made helpless by circumstances outside his control. Could Sanderson do better? Keller repeated, "Give us a little more time, Sanderson."

"A little more time," Sanderson said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MOGO committee checked over its books and discovered that there was still a balance of six hundred dollars and sixty-six cents.

"Money left over from the reception fund," the treasurer explained. "What are we going to do with it?"

"Blow it," someone suggested. "Offer it as a prize for anyone that can make our Mogo guest blow town."

That was it. The radios and newspapers carried the announcement as a public service. "MAKE THE MOGO LEAVE TOWN. AND WIN \$600.66!!!"

Somehow the sporting angle helped to lift the spirits, which had hit a new low the previous week. Captain Keller hailed the contest as a proof that the New Earth people would never be beaten by anything—large or small.

Every evening after the giant had grown comfortable from his day's eating and his afternoon nap, the crowds would gather at the safe side of the park, and listen to any person bold enough to try his arts of persuasion.

Unfortunately, Paul Keller had to rule out most of the would-be contestants because their methods called for violence. Or because the task would be too expensive.

The old carnival man, ushered to the stage by a popular circus couple, Mamma Mountain and Papa Mouse, expounded what many thought a brilliant idea. The carnival man had been a fire eater in his day. He believed that if he demonstrated before the giant, the giant in turn might be persuaded to put a red-hot steel girder to his tongue—but Keller's committee were afraid of the results.

A young student engineer suggested damming the river so that the giant would find himself sitting in a lake. The expense of the project and the time element made it impractical.

The boldest of orators were stubbornly determined to move Faz-O-Faz by sheer persuasion—appealing to

his reason or threatening him with the dire effects of bringing the city to economic ruin.

To these orators, Paul Keller gave his full cooperation, standing by the mikes, interpreting in his limited Mogo vocabulary the best of the contestants' arguments. The Mogo words made some impression, no doubt about it. The giant would occasionally blink his orange eyes with mild interest, and once, it was declared by many, he smiled—languidly. But more often than not, he would give his shaggy head a shake, as if to say, "Don't bother me," and, mumbling a few incomprehensible words, would allow his eyes to close for the night.

"We'd just as well equip another expedition for Mogo land," one of the committee remarked after six days of failure. "There's no other way."

"One week—that's what we promised the public. The contest still has another day."

"And if no one wins?"

"Give the money to the orator who made the giant smile."

"That's all we can do."

So it was agreed that the contest would continue until midnight the following night.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT DAWN A space flivver sailed in and landed, and the city was awakened to the news that George and Anna Hurley had returned, safe and sound.

They might have spent the next twenty-four hours talking to the wide-eyed reporters, explaining a few of the things that had happened to them. But George Hurley left most of the talking to Anna, who knew all the shortcuts. He took one look around the city and asked, "What the devil?"

"If you have any ideas for moving

that giant out of town, bring them on," Paul Keller said. "As you see, we're beat!"

"Have you whispered into the old boy's ears in his own language?" Hurley asked.

"Everything but. We've doubled the volume on the amplifiers, and we've lectured him till there's nothing more to tell him. If he had any conscience, he'd be ashamed to accept another free meal. But look at him!"

The giant hand had just spread its shadow over the railway tracks, and up went a string of cars, leaving a cloud of grain over the west end of the city.

"I'll wait till he's through eating," Hurley said. "Then I'll climb into his ear and take a loud-speaker with me."

In midafternoon, just as Faz-O-Faz was easing into his nap, they lowered George Hurley from a helicopter, and he swung into the mammoth ear on the left side of the giant's head. For the next half hour he shouted himself hoarse, with the loud speaker going full blast. But all he got for an answer was an occasional snore. He nestled down in a nest of hairs within the folds of the ear, and waited for Faz-O-Faz to finish his nap.

Anna, meanwhile, was making headlines with her excited account of goings-on in Venus and, later, in Banrah, Africa.

"...They'd killed poor little Limpy Lady...shot her through the heart.... We found out later, Poppendorf did it. You remember Poppendorf—always quick that way—trying to make Madam Zukor believe he was a ready hero.... Then I found that George had given the Zukor stooges the slip and had taxied back to Conclave Hall to find poor little me. Me, I was already gone, looking for him. But we all three got together

at the space port—Big Boy and Purple Wings and me—and we didn't even take time to call the Embassy, Big Boy was so worried about Green Flash. We darted right straight for the Earth, and believe it or not we were there waiting, hiding in the edge of the jungle, when Madam Zukor's shipload of new wingmen came in for a landing."

"**A**ND MADAM ZUKOR was with them?" a reporter asked.

"Goodness, no. She wouldn't take the chance. Besides, she had another date with the Mercury Ambassador, to make sure he'd go on backing his plan through the Conclave. In fact, she'd had just enough tangles with the law by this time so that she was already packing up for a trip to Mercury. And with that ugly Ambassador! I'd think she'd rather go to prison."

"You mean the law was actually closing in on her?"

"It would depend on Waterfield. He said if the Conclave backed the Mercury Ambassador, he'd go the limit to get Zukor sentenced. I don't know what's happened since we raced off for Africa."

"Then Poppendorf and 'Doctor' Millrock accompanied the shipload of released inmates—"

"And went right to work on them, as soon as they landed in Banrah, trying to buy them over to be heroes for Zukor. It might have worked if they had succeeded in killing Green Flash. They postponed that job until they reached Banrah, and there we were waiting. So Purple Wings upset that! And you can guess the rest. You know, Green Flash and Purple Wings are a combination you can't beat. Poppendorf and his doctor were in a minority. So what I started to say was...if we need any help here, un-

doing the damage of the Mogo giant, Green Flash will be glad to bring his whole wingman tribe over and join forces with us."

CHAPTER XXX

GEORGE HURLEY bounced up through the wilderness of hairs so fast he almost tumbled down the giant's cheek. He held tight to a tuft, shouting into the mike and motioning to the helicopter to come back.

They picked him up and he rode straight to Captain Keller's office, so excited he could hardly talk. When he reached Keller, all he could say was, "*Chocolate! Chocolate!*"

That was all he needed to say. In a matter of minutes the helicopter swung past the giant's face and, by a twist of George Hurley's wrist, succeeded in dropping a harrel of chocolate syrup in the giant's mouth.

The action brought noticeable results. It established a more congenial communication between guest and host than had previously existed. Faz-O-Faz at once learned one of Earth Man's words, "*Chocolate.*"

"He's asking for more," Hurley observed, as if the others in his party didn't know.

"Tell him we have more to give him but it isn't here," Captain Keller communicated.

George relayed the message in the Mogog language. The giant appeared interested enough to raise his eyebrows and grin. People living on the other side of the city who thought they had heard a blast of thunder out of a clear sky were quickly informed by radio that it was Faz-O-Faz uttering the word "*Chocolate.*"

"Tell him to follow you out into the country and you'll have more for him," Captain Keller called.

George Hurley tried hard. In his

best Mogo, he pleaded the case of abundant chocolate to be found elsewhere.

The giant's answer 'would long be remembered by the people of the New Earth capitol, who had watched their guest spend his days in soggy silence. At last Faz-O-Faz was quite in the mood to make a reply, and he answered George Hurley straight from his indolent heart.

The mutterings were soft and fluid, like drums in the sky. George Hurley interpreted the Mogo words.

"He says he is our guest. We must bring the chocolate to him."

Photographers in helicopters caught the action on film. The giant produced from his pocket the same sixty-foot canvas. He spread it on the ground at the edge of Cliff Park, and pointed to its printed promises of hospitality. Then in his sky-drum Mogo, he repeated his request. Bring the chocolate to him.

He spent the rest of the evening repeating the word "*Chocolate*" each time he felt like speaking. George Hurley and Captain Keller went into a huddle and admitted they couldn't win. Then Hurley, stubborn as he was, had the helicopter take him back into the air and deposit him in the giant's ear with a loud-speaker. For hours to come he would doggedly tell the giant that there were whole mountains of chocolate to be had elsewhere.

HE STOPPED his propaganda only when he became so hoarse he could scarcely speak. The giant was resting quietly in his usual pose. George listened to the program that was going on at the farther edge of the park. It was the finish of a contest, and to his amazement an important little business man, Jay Sanderson had come up with an idea which everyone believed might win

the prize. At least it was worth trying.

In order to see what was happening, George quickly tied together several lengths of the giant's rope-like hair, made a loop, and allowed himself the luxury of swinging far out on the shell of the giant's ear. From this vantage point he saw the helicopter pass the giant's mouth, tossing in a barrel, as before. Whether the barrel contained chocolate syrup or not, Hurley couldn't tell—but he saw, by the flood lights, that something else was being hurled in. It proved to be a smoke tube, connected to pumps and a sizable supply of smoke.

The giant blinked his eyes as the smoke rolled up over his face. He blew out with a snort that almost ended the meeting. Then, as the smoke kept coming, he inhaled, apparently enjoying the experience.

For a long moment it seemed that all the smoke had drifted away—then it appeared again from the giant's nostrils. A cloud curved upward. Again it seemed all gone. And then it came again—through the ears.

It might have been an interesting sight to the spectators. To George Hurley, clinging to a rope of hair on the shell of the big fellow's left ear, it was sheer murder. Smoke engulfed him—not just plain ordinary fire smoke, but smoke scented with the rich indescribable scents that came from a dusty ear of a shaggy Mogo.

George was still kicking and coughing and holding tight when the fog cleared. He would have no more of that! He tried to order the helicopter to come back. But now, near midnight, the program was coming to a close, and everyone had been ordered to be quiet as the results of a contest were read.

Would the committee give the prize to Sanderson? The giant had moved a

little, but had settled back in his old position.

"Two minutes left to go," came the voice of the announcer. "If there are no further entries—"

Then, watching from his perch in the giant's ear, George Hurley saw what he couldn't quite understand. Anna was running up to the platform with little Georgie, Junior in her arms. They made way for her and she hurried up to the row of microphones. There she stood, talking to Georgie Junior.

Suddenly she tickled him in the ribs, and the little fellow chortled.

He chortled distinctly, saying some funny words he remembered. "Ka-woozie-ka-woozie! Keetle, keetle, keetle!"

The giant Faz-O-Faz suddenly rose to his feet dripping with dust and raced away into the night's blackness as hard as he could go.

CHAPTER XXXI

AFTERWARD, George boasted that he must have had pretty fair presence of mind to hold onto his radio. The giant ran all of three hundred miles before he tamed down to a walk. George had scrambled deep into the folds of the ear and anchored himself in the softest, safest place he could find. The smell of smoke bothered him for awhile; then, it seemed, a slight drift of fresh air seeped in through the fleshy wilderness. It was a strange ride, one he would never forget—and he kept telling himself that it had been brought on by the cleverness of his own little George, Junior! Wouldn't he love that boy—if he got back alive!

It was dawn before George succeeded in describing his position to the several planes on the search.

Many hours later he was rescued

while the giant slept in the sun on another warm hillside.

The combined imaginations of Katherine Keller and Jay Sanderson devised a plan that was destined to keep the giant occupied for quite a little time. It was referred to as Operation Chocolate, and it worked pretty well, thanks to the discovery of a two-thousand-foot dry oil well in the vicinity of the giant's new resting place.

Cameras, concealed in the terrain, recorded the action, a sequence destined to become a classic in the annals of the New Earth. It was a film to be forever enjoyed by the adults who had endured the prolonged visit of an uncooperative Mogo guest—a film which would arouse vague dissatisfactions among the curious children, who could never quite appreciate such a mysterious case of frustration.

It began with a view of the sleepy Faz-O-Faz awakening, yawning, shifting his position in the dust of the hillside—then widening his eyes with interest as he discovered a harrel lying on the ground.

He broke into the harrel, drained it of its syrup, and looked around. There was another harrel, farther on, and he exerted himself to the extent of taking three steps. Presently he was following a trail of harrels until he came to a veritable pyramid of them, carefully balanced at the top of a chute. The chute led to a well—how deep? The picture offered the information. Two thousand feet—slightly longer than any Mogo giant's arm.

As Faz-O-Faz started to pick up another barrel, the pyramid began to roll. Before Faz-O-Faz's bewildered eyes, those dozens of barrels rolled down the chute and dropped out of sight. The giant looked down in the well, he studied the matter, and after

awhile he began digging the soil away with his hands. He dug for several hours. Exhausting himself, he slept. He awakened. He dug. He slept. He dug until a mountain of earth had formed around him, and the cameras revealed that he went right on digging.

He was digging when Gret-O-Gret arrived—and there the picture ended. George Hurley's little boy thought it was a disappointing film; the giant should have finally got to the chocolate syrup. Older boys thought he should have struck oil. But all that happened was that he rose up, looking very grimy and somewhat sheepish, to discover that another Mogo, one with calm eyes and a kindly face, was saying hello to him.

CHAPTER XXXII

GRET-O-GRET was greeted at once by the people of the New Earth as the answer to their offers of hospitality.

Gret looked over the damaged city and the disorganized countryside surrounding it, and realized that what he had feared had surely happened. He related to Captain Keller that, on Mogo, he had missed the certificate of invitation; he had missed a space ship; and he had missed Faz-O-Faz. It had been a simple deduction, putting the three disappearances together. At once he had envisioned what disasters might befall the New Earth from the presence of such a guest. And so Gret-O-Gret had dropped his affairs of state and rocketed to the Solar System.

The flight between Gret and Faz-O-Faz lasted nine minutes and took place, according to the foottracks discernible from planes, over an area of only eight hundred square miles. Two rivers changed their courses, and one rural town would have been demol-

ished but for Gret's clever footwork, prompted by the bark of a dog that sounded in one of his ankle ears.

Gret appeared, an hour or so after his fight with Faz-O-Faz, bearing the ne'er-do-well on his shoulders, a mile above the surface of the land. He succeeded in opening the locks to Faz' ship, loaded the fellow in, wakened him with smelling salts; he set the ship for automatic flight, got out and secured the locks just before it charged off into the sky.

At that point, radios announced to the world that the New Earth's guest had departed.

And then, to everyone's delight, the studio bands began playing, "We've Got a Great Big Brother..."

And before the sun had set, Gret-O-Gret had rolled up his sleeves and begun removing wreckage, straightening bent girders, smoothing the industrial sites, and preparing the way for a new spree of industrial development.

Late that night the first load of winged neighbors dropped in from Africa. Several loads were to follow—for Green Flash and Purple Wings had convinced most of the winged tribe that it was a good time to be neighborly to the New Earth people across the sea.

By the end of the week, five hundred wingmen were flying back and forth over the city, running errands by the shortest routes, pepping up the new cycle of progress that was bursting into life everywhere.

"Poppendorf?" one of the wingmen said when George and Anna Hurley inquired what had happened to their ex-leaders. "Poppendorf very sick... In our hospital... Must stay long time."

GEORGE and Anna understood. They remembered the caves

with the bars at Banrab. Wherever bars were placed over doors, the wingmen called it a hospital. As this wingman and others knew, Poppendorf had been "very sick... He killed Limpy Lady... He be sick for long time..."

And what of "Doctor" Millrock?

The wingman declared that a doctor belonged in the hospital too. Bars had been provided for Millrock.

"Millrock send a gift to George... This." And the wingman, serving as messenger, flipped a half dollar in the air and caught it. "He say, have George name it... George gets it."

"I can name it all right," George Hurley said, taking the coin revealing its peculiar property to Anna.

"This was one of his favorites," George said, "I remember it well. So he wanted me to have it!"

Anna gave a gasp of surprise. "Look, Big Boy, it has my picture on both sides."

George smiled. "The so-called doctor was your admirer."

The wingman smiled. "Doctor Millrock very mad. Madam Zukor gone to Mercury. She never make him a general."

"He'll do just fine as a doctor, behind the bars," George said. "Give him my greetings—and what do you think, Anna, shall we send him a barrel of chocolate syrup just for a good will present?"

"Later, Big Boy. Just now we're pretty busy."

George grinned and rolled up his sleeves. Yes, there was work to be done, and the wingmen as well as the New Earth citizens were in the mood to rebuild. Gret-O-Gret had passed the word along that no one was to worry too much about any measure passed by the Interplanetary Conclave, for he was going to stand by as long as they needed a big brother.



Willie wood irene with his success—to find her not worth the winning

TOO MANY WORLDS

By
Irving E. Cox Jr.



Would you like to wake up in a nightmare world where none of the old laws work? Then take this trip into a strange hell

HE WAS HALFWAY to the city, barreling along the express arterial, before he recovered from the numbing hypnosis of the nightmare. He remembered nothing of the dream, except the feeling that invisible cords were being drawn tight on his mind, slowly smothering him. He had awakened exhausted. Mechanically he went through the morning routine of dressing, kissing Irene, and leaving for work.

As his mind began to function again, he became aware that his speedometer had climbed past eighty.

He decreased the speed. Then, with a cold shock shivering along his spine, he looked again at the chromium dial and its surrounding field of red leather. He was driving a sleek, Nile-green Cadillac convertible. And he had never seen the car before.

He turned off the arterial and pulled to a stop on a deserted side street near the Bay. Wisps of cold morning mist hung in trailing threads over the road, dancing gray shadows against the dismal sky. With trembling fingers he twisted the registration slip, fastened to the steering col-

umn, so that he could read it. The owner of the Cadillac, he discovered, was Albert Hammond, of 3754 Via Wanda Way.

But that was his own name! And he drove a Buick, two years old.

Hammond snapped open the glove compartment. There was his old hrier, Irene's scarf, the familiar Auto Club map book, and a letter which he recognized at once. Irene had given it to him three days ago and asked him to mail it on his way to work. As he sometimes did, he had stuffed it into the glove compartment and forgotten it.

But that had been in the Buick! He was sure of that. Or nearly so. He checked the registration slip again, and saw that he had bought the Cadillac six months before. Sweat broke out on his forehead. Somehow he had forgotten his own actions for the past half-year.

He felt ashamed—and frightened. He wondered if he should see Dr. Betts. But, if he did, what would he say? That he thought he was cracking up? That his mind was failing him at thirty-five, when he had reached the floodtide of mental and physical vigor? There was nothing in his life to drive him to madness. He was in good health, successful in business, immensely happy with Irene and their two children.

No, it was impossible to allow even a doctor to know what had happened. Hammond had to handle this himself.

He went on to work. The General offices for his freight line were on the top floor of a warehouse-terminal on Market Street not far from the Ferry Building. The first overnight rigs from Los Angeles and Portland were pulling into the yard, scarlet boxes lettered in flaming orange THE RED ARROW LINES. Hammond took the elevator up to his office.

THE BILLING-ACCOUNTING department, spread over forty desks in the main office, was in a chaos of activity. Hammond was used to a friendly, relaxed office atmosphere. He had always prided himself on his good relations with his employees. No more than a score had quit the Red Arrow Line in the past decade. Most of them called him by his first name.

Now, only one or two nodded, and their greeting was hesitant and fearful. The violent onslaught on work redoubled as he entered the office. It was a burlesque of efficiency, set to a driving tempo. It was not a business office, but its caricature, the sort of farce dreamed up for a musical comedy or a slap-stick parable out of Hollywood. The switchboard girl actually cringed when Hammond approached, as if she expected him to lash her with a whip. And Joe Kelly, the chief biller, leaped fully three feet when Hammond addressed him.

Hammond fled into his private office. He jerked a pint of whisky out of his desk drawer and poured himself a stiff drink. This office comedy must be something else he had created during the past six months. If so, the Red Arrow Line would have been driven close to insolvency. Hammond called his chief accountant on the intercom and asked to see the profit statements for the last two periods.

After he had read the report, he snatched up the whisky and drained what was left from the bottle, for the profits had been enormous. The accountant hovered over his shoulder anxiously, pulling at a loose button on his frayed coat. For all the world, he reminded Hammond of Mr. Cratchit in the *Christmas Carol*.

"Sit down, Tim; sit down!" Hammond had intended to speak softly, as he always did, but he was amazed at the vicious bite in his voice. He

bad a feeling that he was someone else, not himself—an actor playing a role in a ridiculous farce.

"Mr. Hammond, sir—I—you see, sir—this report—"

"Out with it, Tim!" The bark was angrily ferocious.

"The truth is, sir, I know we're not showing quite the profit that we should this period. It's the new ship line you bought last week."

Mentally Hammond reeled. What ship line? So far as he knew, he was only in the trucking business, and, as such things went, a very small operator.

"Trans-Pacific is basically sound, of course," the accountant assured him. "We've taken over twelve more good freighters, and thirty new tankers; but their receivables have to be overhauled. I'm sure we'll show our usual profit next month."

"And just what is our usual profit, Tim?" Hammond had intended to make the question cautiously exploratory. Instead, his tone was heavy with slashing sarcasm.

"We aim at forty percent on the gross revenue, Mr. Hammond, sir, and I'm fully aware that we're not—"

Hammond dismissed the accountant weakly and slumped down in his chair, his face and hands wet with sudden sweat. Forty percent on the gross! No business made such a profit. This whole situation was a travesty of reality, grossly overdone.

For the first time Hammond wondered if this were the nightmare, rather than the nameless terror that had closed on his mind during the night. Conscientiously he tried to pull himself awake from the dream. He used every trick he could think of, but with no results.

As the initial shock subsided, Hammond began to adjust to the situation. Or, rather, the adjustment came

in spite of himself, as if he were speaking a part in a rather badly written play. The correct words, tone, and gesture came involuntarily, no matter what he intended. The rest of the players seemed to accept him quite seriously in the new characterization. Even when he tried to be himself—to act, at least, as he assumed he had six months ago—he was misinterpreted.

THE BOARD of Directors met this afternoon. The Red Arrow Line had never had such a board, to Hammond's knowledge, and the men who gathered in his office were strangers. Yet they knew him intimately. Furthermore, he seemed to know precisely how to preside; he was amazed at the lucid presentation he made of the unfinished business of the previous meeting—which, so far as he knew, he had not attended.

The Board Meeting, however, proved very instructive. Hammond learned that he was the president of the largest trucking line on the Pacific Coast. He had general offices in Portland, Seattle, San Diego, and Los Angeles, in addition to this terminal in San Francisco. He owned a fleet of freighters and cargo vessels, a commercial airline, and miscellaneous parcels of city real estate.

By all accounts, he was a captain of industry with a very unsavory personality. As a landlord of slum property, he took delight in evicting the destitute. He boasted of the blatant devices he used in order to evade his proper taxes, apparently so sure of his immunity that he could make the discussion a part of the Board minutes. And, finally, he seemed to take pride in the systematic cruelties he practiced toward his employees.

None of it was good business, as Hammond understood the term. Nor

was it his personality, as he understood himself. Yet nothing he did or said made any difference. The words he spoke were not his own; they were entirely divorced from the thought he intended. He was helplessly playing a role, and so was everyone else.

It was not insanity; Hammond was sure of that, because the internal logic of the situation was too highly integrated, the detail of reality too tangible. Something had happened, but not to him alone. The whole world around him had changed; to what extent, he was afraid to guess.

In the uncertainty, there was one thing he could cling to, his love for Irene. They had been married for ten years, and they were still as much in love as when they had their first high-school date. If Irene had not changed, the rest could become bearable.

He drove home slowly that afternoon, pushed by his anxiety to see Irene and reassure himself, and yet afraid to find out. Around him the city of San Francisco glittered in the golden sunlight, beautiful and unchanged,—until he began to notice the bizarre differences.

The Ferry Building was enormous. The Top of the Mark was like a gigantic glass cube weighing down on the insignificant building beneath it. The presidio was a vast acreage of grass plots and old cannon. Knob Hill soared up like a craggy Everest, studded with sprawling, gleaming mansions. And tremendous, blazing neon signs, brighter even than the setting sun, proclaimed the location of the Barbary Coast and Chinatown. The rest of the city was indistinct in a gray haze.

San Francisco, as Hammond knew it, had given way to San Francisco as a tourist might have remembered it, or as an archeologist of the future might have reconstructed it from the

evidence of penny postcards.

MUCH THE same thing had happened to his home. Yet he knew that it was his. Yesterday's modestly comfortable white-walled bungalow had been transformed into a formal granite fortress, modeled on the Palace of Versailles. A tall, thin, aloof butler met him at the door.

"The master had a good day, I trust?"

"So-so, James. Is the madam ready?" It was by no means what Hammond had meant to say, but he was hardly surprised. He was growing used to playing his part. He began to feel that he was splitting into two people. One, himself, was being slowly driven out of the physical body named Albert Hammond by an aggressive stranger who seemed entirely at home in this weird world.

"She is waiting in the Red Room, sir."

Hammond found Irene standing by an elegant Louis XVI lounge, motionless in a blaze of sunlight. When Hammond opened the door of the Red Room, it was like the rising of a curtain on a new scene. He had the impression that she had been immobile and lifeless for an eternity, waiting for the moment of his coming which would bring her reality.

Hammond plunged into bitter despair, for only faintly did this woman resemble the Irene he knew. Dressed in a clinging, ornate evening gown, she was very young, sensuously beautiful and graceful. When she spoke her voice rang out with the tinkling music of a high-school girl, not the comfortable assurance of a mature woman.

"I was so afraid you might be late, Albert," she cooed. "We're going to the Berkeleys', you know."

"It's hard to get away early on Board Meeting day."

"Fortunately, you don't have to change, dear; none of the men are going formal." He hadn't heard her use those exact words, in that tone, since the night of their high-school prom. A split second that forgotten quarrel was very vivid in his mind. She had changed her mind only when she found that none of the other boys were going to wear Tuxedos, but until the afternoon of the Prom she had threatened to go with someone else. What was his name? Willie. Willie Tuttle!

As he remembered the name, a pain stabbed into Hammond's mind, and vanished. It was like the dream that had crushed into his soul during the night, numbing, hypnotic, and terrifying.

Hammond knew neither the Berkeleys nor their guests, but the usurper who ruled his body seemed to be on excellent terms with them all. The party was quite in the romantic tradition of the gushiest of women's magazines. Hammond caught tantalizing scraps of talk that could have served as captions for full-page, full-color illustrations.

"I know my baby comes first, always, but does that mean that I must give up the only man I love?"

"Oh, Charles, must we part again, so soon—so terribly, terribly soon?"

"And then he swept me into his arms, and our lips met, warm and tender, pulsing with the purity of our new-found love."

Hammond was slowly nauseated by the appearance of the guests. The women were all alike, resembling Irene—polished, highly glazed adolescents, masquerading as women. And the men were pretty companion pieces, big, virile, young, heavily tanned, and forever smiling tenderly.

BUT, IN SPITE of himself, Hammond joined heartily with the others, mouthing inanities he would have held back if he could.

On the way home he found the courage to ask Irene about their two children. The question had been seething in his mind since he had returned from work, but he had been afraid to ask it. Now, though he guessed the truth and already writhed in its agony, he could not put it off.

"Tom and Jean?" Irene repeated, without understanding. "Who in the world are they, Albert?"

"Our children, Irene!"

"Are we supposed to have any?"

"Don't you know?"

"Why, Albert, you're joking! Of course not." She nestled close against his arm, like a starry-eyed girl on her first date, gently caressing his sleeve. "You're so big and strong, Albert: and it's so wonderful having you beside me. Wasn't the Berkeley party just scrumptious?"

The next day Hammond saw a psychiatrist. He was a good man, highly recommended by Dr. Betts. While Hammond talked, he listened patiently. Afterwards he laced his fingers and leaned back in his leather chair, pursing his lips.

"A fascinating delusion, Mr. Hammond," he conceded. "I've never encountered another case quite like it." "Then these things aren't real?"

"On the contrary, they are all very real. It's this other thing—this normal world, as you call it—that makes your story interesting. In most psychiatric situations, the patient escapes from the everyday world by building an hallucination for himself. You have done the reverse. You see the world around you exactly as it is, but you're convinced that it is an illusion."

"But I do have two children, doc-

tor—two of the finest kids you've ever seen! And now Irene tells me—"

"The children, too, are part of your delusion."

"This—this reality is a distortion of everything I've ever known!"

"Mr. Hammond, there is an external reality of material things which we all know and share. But a person's only contact with external reality is through the interpretations of his own senses. You see and feel and hear the things around you, just as I do, but your own mind gives meaning to the sensations. If the meaning you get is reasonably like everyone else's, we say you are normal and sane. That's the only basis for judgment that we have. For all I know, we might all be quite wrong. But my point is this: in actual fact, what each of us does is create our own private universes. This delusion of yours is that sort of thing. It is your world as you would make it ideally, not as it is."

The psychiatrist got up, extending his hand. "I'm going to prescribe a lot of rest and relaxation for you, Mr. Hammond. For a while, don't live your business problems so intensely. Get out and enjoy yourself more. Come and see me in a week or so and we'll see how you're feeling then."

The psychiatrist was Hammond's last resort, and he had answered nothing. Hammond left the office frustrated by the words and utterly bewildered.

THE FIRST day set the pattern for Hammond for nearly a week. His business life consisted of making monotonously caddish coups which always turned out to be enormously profitable. And every night Hammond and Irene went out, or entertained themselves. It was an exhaustive routine, but Hammond felt no fatigue. His

sleep was sound and dreamless.

Dreamless, except that once he awoke in the early morning hours, screaming aloud the name of Willie Tuttle. He couldn't remember why he felt so terrified, why his body was cold with sweat. But the name clung tenaciously to his mind.

Willie Tuttle! Hammond remembered him vaguely as a mousy, insignificant, dreamy boy who had gone to high school with him and Irene. He hadn't seen Willie in fifteen years. Yet the name rang so persistently in his thoughts, Hammond wanted to find him again. Somehow he was sure that Willie could explain the transformation that had taken place in the world.

In the morning Hammond telephoned the high school and began the slow process of tracing Willie through the series of mediocre jobs he had held since graduation. It was two days before he found that Willie was currently employed by the Red Arrow Line as a biller in the Los Angeles office. Hammond determined to summon him to San Francisco the next day.

But that night he had his second nightmare.

Insensible to every stimulus except the choking fog he was fighting slowly out of his mind, Hammond dragged himself through another morning routine. It was routine in the sense that he knew by instinct what he must do, but he was also aware that his environment was totally different once again.

He bolted a breakfast of cereal and toast at a battered kitchen table, with Irene and their two brawling children. There was no time for family niceties. As usual, they were all just a little late. Irene, work-worn and tired, wearing a faded dressing gown that was splattered with stove grease, tried ineffectually to keep peace at the ta-

ble. Hammond—again as usual—stormed and threatened punishment, but the hickering of the children went right on.

Irene kissed him and handed him his scarred macapail. He banged out of the house and climbed into his car. The motor whined and whined and finally started. Hammond clattered out of the drive, narrowly missing the scrawny palm that grew in the parkway—as he always did.

When he was able to think rationally, he found that he was on the Glendale-Los Angeles Freeway, and he was driving a Ford, twelve years old. Acrid banks of smog blotted out the city of Los Angeles, yet Hammond knew precisely where he was going. He was a junior rate clerk in the Los Angeles terminal of the Red Arrow Line. It was a job he had held for a decade, without promotion and afraid to quit because he had a family to support.

The situation was understandably sound and logical. The only thing wrong was that it was also quite mad. Yet, if he were insane, would the appearance of this new environment have seemed so very tangible? He could feel the worn seat covers beneath his thighs; he could see the blistered, faded paint on the exterior of the sedan. The bent left fender—he remembered smashing it on a foggy night, five years ago. The stain on the back seat—he remembered how Jean had spilled her bottle there when she was still a baby.

IF THIS were an illusion, it came equipped with a detailed and integrated peripheral reality. A week ago he had felt that he was being split into two persons; now it was three. He had distinct memories of three entirely separate pasts; three distinct personalities, three separate

worlds were crowded into the physical being of Albert Hammond. If only one of them were real, as other people defined reality, which of the three was it?

The shock of the second transformation was minimized by the memory of the first. Hammond proceeded cautiously to feel his way into this new world, but the caution was unnecessary. He could draw upon an accumulation of past experiences as the underpaid, overworked rate clerk for the Red Arrow Line. He did his day's work without a hitch.

He went home to the familiar nagging of an overcrowded house and a family trapped by the bitterness of economic mediocrity. None of the equipment in the tiny jerry-built cottage functioned properly. Doors sagged and squeaked. The refrigerator clattered so that it shook the paper-thin walls. The ancient radio spluttered and faded and sometimes did not work at all. The plumbing either dripped or was plugged up, and the floor lamps waved back and forth when anyone strode across the living room.

The children had no place to play except the living room, and they quarreled continuously over their few cheap toys. Irene was always worn out by her daily conflict with the house, and the strain of stretching a slim budget to meet the needs of a family of four.

Hammond no longer had the feeling that he was playing a part. He had full control of what he said, and he could have asked Irene for any explanation he wanted. But it was impossible to talk to her. In this world their love had died years ago beneath the steady hammering of work.

This was a special night, apparently, for as soon as the dinner dishes

were cleared away, Irene said she was going in to dress.

"I made over the blue that Mrs. Slovena gave me," she said. "I think it'll do. You'll wear your Sunday suit, won't you, Al?"

"Are we—are we going out?" Something fixed in his memory told him that the question was superfluous, but he couldn't place the details.

"Don't tell me you've forgotten!" Irene's voice was shrill with anger, yet she was close to tears. "It's the Red Arrow anniversary dinner, and we're invited."

"Oh, yes." Comfortingly he tried to put his arm around her, but she shrugged him away.

"Willie Tuttle only invited us for old time's sake, because we all went to high school together."

"Willie Tuttle?"

"Just the president of the company, that's all. And he asked us on his own personal stationery! Oh, Albert, maybe you'll have a chance to put in a word about your job!"

The anniversary dinner was held in the Beverly-Wilshire. It was definitely a big-time affair. The mayor, the governor, a delegation of Congressmen, Hollywood stars, and lesser politicians were crowded at the table of honor, like celestial dignitaries at the feet of President Tuttle. Willie himself ate in a blaze of spotlights, seated on a level slightly higher than his guests. Hammond and Irene were shabby poor relations in so much glitter. They were grateful to have a tiny table hidden away in the rear of the room.

THE SPEECHES were long and monotonously identical. Governor, mayor, and assembled Congressmen all lavished ecstatic praise on Willie Tuttle for his services to

mankind, to business, and to the great and glorious State of California. Through it all Willie basked in the spotlight, modestly sipping gallons of champagne and smiling upon the multitude after each rousing round of applause.

When the speeches were over the cloth-of-gold curtain at one end of the room was pulled back, revealing the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, which had come to play for the dancing. Followed by his halo of spotlights, Willie Tuttle walked the length of the hall toward Hammond and Irene.

His progress was slow because guests kept crowding around him crying for his autograph. With a gracious flourish, Willie always obliged. As he came closer, Hammond saw that Willie was amazingly handsome, combining qualities of Charles Atlas, Allan Ladd and Tyrone Power with the atmospheric culture of Ronald Colman.

Hammond arose and went to meet him. Willie was related to the weird series of transformations that had overturned Hammond's life and, despite the throng, Hammond intended to force an explanation from him. The two men met in front of Hammond's table. Willie was smiling broadly, exuding an air of success. But when Hammond tried to speak, to ask the questions crowding his mind, he mumbled and stuttered helplessly. Once again he knew he was playing a part.

"How do you like it with things reversed, Al? Which of us do you think Irene would choose now?"

The thought was Willie's, but somehow he had spoken to Hammond without saying the words aloud. In that instant Hammond understood many things, as if Willie had suddenly told him the drab story of his life—of his yearning, his frustration, his bungling incompetence; of his bitter

envy of Hammond's success; and of his driving desire for Irene.

The realization came in a flash and was gone. Subservient and servile, Hammond stepped back, bowing a little as Willie moved toward the table and Irene. Irene stood up, her tired face radiant, her lips trembling.

Willie stopped, staring at her. His smile faded. His face drained of color. As it did, a flood of energy flowed into Hammond's soul as if he had been released from an invisible bondage. He clenched his fists and sprang at Willie. Indecisive and frightened, Willie backed away; but his hesitation was momentary. He paused and cried out in anguish,

"No; no! This won't work! It has to be done differently!"

As if the projected scene of a motion picture had been suddenly stilled, the activity and sound in the banquet hall became frozen and immobile. Dancers stood like statues; waiters were dead, in the act of removing dishes from tables; the curtain, waving in the wind, hung like a thing made of grass; and the air throbbed with the single note the orchestra had been playing when the paralysis came upon them.

Hammond was lifeless, like the others; a part of his mind went blank, but his two other worlds remained intact. Hammond saw the room as a picture, hidden in the depth of a body of water. Only Willie Tuttle had life. Willie looked for a moment at the lifeless statues around him, and then he approached Irene.

HE FINGERED her straggling hair; he ran his hand over the wrinkled gray skin of her face; he lifted her hand and touched the reddened callouses. When Willie looked up, he was crying. Furiously he lashed out at Irene, to sweep her

aside, but his swinging arms passed through her body like knives cleaving quiet water.

Willie stepped back, surveying the motionless throng. As he reached a decision a sly smile crept over his face. With a flick of his wrist he removed one of the men standing near Hammond's table and replaced him with a dignified, white-haired gentleman.

He turned and faced Hammond, grinning.

"In a burst of light and sound, motion came back to the room, but the time element had been altered. Hammond was back at the point where he went to face Willie and force an explanation from him.

A thick, pulsing hatred arose within Hammond, like the quaking of an unleashed volcano. He began to shout into Willie's smirking face, crying that Willie did not own the Red Arrow Line, that it belonged to him, to Albert Hammond. He would have smashed his knuckles into Willie's gleaming teeth, but men rose on all sides to hold him back.

They carried him, screaming, into an empty lounge. As Hammond's rage subsided, he saw that the dignified, white-haired gentleman was with him.

"Feeling better, Mr. Hammond?"

"I guess I did go off my rocker a little, didn't I?"

"It sometimes happens if we work too hard. Mr. Tuttle asked me to tell you he won't press any charges, but if there's a repetition of this outburst he'll take steps to have you committed."

"The strange thing is, I—somehow I know I'm right! I do own the company, but I live in San Francisco and my wife—"

"Mr. Hammond, we all day-dream. It's normal for a man to envy his

boss and to imagine how things would be if he were in his place. Our dreams are our own private worlds. We can build them as we like, fill them with puppets of our own making. But it's madness if you allow yourself to confuse your own dream-world with reality."

"A psychiatrist told me that same thing almost a week ago, in San Francisco—but I owned the company, then."

"I'm advising you to get a lot of rest, Mr. Hammond. If this happens again, you won't get off so easily. I'll give you a tablet to take before you go to bed tonight."

Hammond drove back to Glendale in a seething storm of disgrace. Irene's quarrelsome voice picked fitfully at the bones of his brief and one-sided battle with Willie. She heaped high her scorn and denunciation, never pausing for breath, never asking him for his explanation.

Hammond took the sleeping tablet and went to bed. Irene was still talking. Twice she shook him awake to tell him again how much he had embarrassed her and to demand,

"Whatever can we do, now? Of course Willie won't keep you on at the office after this!"

Eventually Irene ran through even her score of bitterness and the tiny, dismal bedroom fell silent. Hammond dozed and the tension in his muscles began to relax. To sleep was to forget. To sleep was to—

TO DREAM! He jerked himself back to consciousness, fighting the creeping paralysis of the drug. When he slept he was helpless, trapped by the nightmares that over-turned his world. He sat up, staring at the pattern of light the corner

streetlamp threw on the bedroom ceiling.

Very slowly he began to understand what had happened. A madman created a dream-world and escaped into it, and for him that world was real; it would be real, too, from the point of view of the dream itself.

Hammond, then, had become caught in dream-worlds made by someone else.

Willie Tuttle! These were his puppet universes, the gaudy delusions of a futile, ineffectual, timid nonentity, envying Hammond his success and his possession of Irene. The first transformation had framed Hammond's San Francisco existence in the romantic nonsense Willie botched together out of his restricted experiences and his imagination. And the second had reduced Hammond to a poverty and a drabness comparable to Willie's. Willie had meant, then, to move across the stage, a glittering lion of success, captivate Irene, and snatch her away. But Willie's dream went wrong, because Irene necessarily had to share Hammond's economic environment. Willie found her an undesirable, work-worn wench, the only possible product of the world Willie had given her.

Willie's only solution was to create another dream in a hurry. He used the white-haired gentleman to engineer a situation which would force Hammond to take a sleeping pill. Willie hadn't had recourse to that particular trick before, but he was apparently frightened and rattled now. He couldn't be sure that Hammond had not guessed the truth, and the only time Willie could bring about the transformation was while Hammond slept.

Hammond dragged himself out of

bed, sluggishly fighting off the drug. If Willie could make the dreams, he could unmake them, too. Hammond had some slight control of the situation now. He knew Willie was staying at the Biltmore. If he could get his hands on Willie, Hammond could force him to restore his own world of reality. Perhaps that was as much an illusion as this, but at least Hammond was at home there and held dominion over his own destiny.

Hammond drove back to Los Angeles. The encroaching weariness rose up against him like an invisible force. He fought it with all his strength, but it was a losing battle.

He left his car in an all-night lot on Hill Street and reeled through Pershing Square toward the Biltmore. He staggered drunkenly, as if his feet were trapped in a sea of mud. His breath came in gasps. His heart lurched.

He dropped on a green bench to rest and he did not get up. His head fell on his chest. The screaming nightmare closed over his mind.

But a spark of himself stayed doggedly alive, whispering over and over again, "This is not real; this is not real." Desperately Hammond seized upon it, while the storm of the dream raged across his soul; the steady whisper gave him courage. Slowly he began to build upon it. If the torment were not real, he could dismiss it simply by refusing to accept it. •

TO DREAM! He jerked himself and then a shout of triumph. Abruptly his fatigue passed. Hammond stood up and looked at the square. All motion was frozen into the one-dimensional reality of a photograph. The leaves on the trees stood still. The water of the fountain hung

in midair, clear crystal tears without weight.

This was Willie's world. By the strength of his conviction, of his belief in himself, Hammond could destroy it. To believe, however, was a desperate struggle against his own established concepts of reality. For a long time he stood where he was, as motionless as the rest of the picture; but the conviction mounted slowly in his mind, and slowly he found that he could walk.

Hesitantly he began to pull the world apart. The edges of the picture blurred into a gray shadow, folding inward like sheets of water. Suddenly he saw Willie running toward him across the square.

"No; no!" Willie screamed. In spite of his effort, he ran sluggishly, fighting the force that dragged against him. When he came close to Hammond, he was livid from exertion. "Leave it be, Hammond, if you want to save either of us!"

"If you can make this dream, Willie, I can destroy it."

"Yes; yes, now that you know how. But, when you do, you'll create a vacuum. There'll be nothing to take its place."

"I don't like your dream, Willie. I want to get back to my own."

Willie pulled himself up and spoke with courage, although his face paled. "You have to depend on me to do that, Hammond, and I'll never do it. I'd rather have the other thing."

"The other thing?"

"Look!" Willie gestured vaguely. Already the buildings in the background had peeled away; the trees were fading, colorless; the brick walks were graying into indistinctness. An emptiness, like a thick fog, was closing around the two men.

"I can create for myself, then," Hammond said.

"You haven't the ability!"

"If I can wipe out your world, why can't I make my own?"

"Because you know you're part of my dream; since you really believe that, you can destroy it. But you're too practical, Hammond, too much the materialist to believe that much in your own. You can erase what I've made; that's as far as you can go. You're too normal to accomplish the other thing; you believe too much in the external reality of things."

Furiously Hammond advanced on Willie. Willie backed away, still talking, still pleading. Underneath a hedge Hammond stumbled upon an electric clipper left there by a park gardener. He picked it up and swung the blade. Willie cringed and screamed. Hammond swung again, and the clipper hit Willie's head. In a final frenzy of angry words, Willie vanished. His world went with him. Hammond stood alone in a vast, gray-white emptiness. He stood on nothing. He felt nothing. He moved freely, but he moved in no direction.

Willie's dream was gone.

Hammond began to create his own. He tried to visualize Irene, their white-walled bungalow, the two-year-old Buick, and the children that he loved. Very faintly the house began to take shape in the mist, but it disappeared when a new thought occurred to him.

IF HE COULD make the world as he wanted it, why not create perfection? He began with the things he thought he needed: wealth, prestige, power, good health; and he discarded them all. He had grown up in a universe in turmoil, among shouting demagogues and in the thunder of war. The one thing above others that he

had learned to desire was security.

Begin with that, then. Make his universe absolutely secure in all things.

He built up the image in his mind, but the gray mist did not lift. He knew that he could create as he pleased; he believed that as he had believed that he could shatter Willie's dream. Yet still the mist held fast.

After a time he was exhausted. He thought that he slept for a while, but he could not be sure. When he awoke, the mist was still there. He knew that hours had passed, but he felt no hunger, no discomfort, nothing except the cold touch of the gray mist.

No discomfort! Then this was the thing that he had created, a universe of absolute security. He was forever safe—and forever alone.

Security by itself meant nothing, then. It was one half of a balanced scale. Security became meaningless unless it was opposed to insecurity.

As he reached that conclusion, the gray fog began to stir. He knew he had found the way back. For a moment he was tempted to pursue the security of absolute power, and a tentative world took form, but it was a madness of screaming adulation for an aloof godhead that was himself. He fled from it back into the blankness of the mist.

He did not want perfection, then, but the semblance of it which he once had had.

The white house took shape. He saw the sun warming the lawn. The colors brightened. He saw children playing in the drive. The detail of the picture took form. He heard the sound of birds in the trees, the splutter of a distant motor on the highway, the whine of a lawn mower.

From out of the void he moved into the house. He saw the white, emaciated form lying on the bed, motionless

under the sheets. Slowly that form became himself. Irene was bending over him as he opened his eyes. He became aware of the bandages that bound his shoulder, of the pain throbbing in his throat.

"You're going to be all right, Al," Irene said. Her hand was cool and soft on his forehead.

"What happened?" His voice was husky, his throat sand dry.

"Yesterday, when we were working in the garden, a man sprang at you from a break in the hedge. He tried to kill you, dear."

"I—I don't remember, Irene."

"No wonder; the doctor gave you a

sedative! In an hour or so you'll be feeling more yourself again."

"Someone tried to kill me? Why, Irene?"

"Goodness knows. He was drunk, I think. You beat him off with the hedge clipper, but he cut your throat very badly with a broken bottle."

"Who was it, Irene? Do I know him?"

"That's the strangest part of it, Al. It was Willie Tuttle. Remember him? He went to high school with us. I almost gave him a date once, for the Junior Prom."

THE END

BUT WHAT DID IT SAY?

By

Jack Winter

AN ANCIENT manuscript engraved in Hebrew letters on a pair of rolled bronze sheets has recently been found in the old caves discovered along the banks of the Dead Sea. As yet, what the rolled bronze sheets contain has not been learned. The problem of cleansing and unrolling the sheets is an extremely delicate one. It has been found that metal which has been in the ground for a long period of time will invariably become very brittle, and will usually crumble when tampered with. So far, most efforts to restore such metal to its natural pliable state have not been too successful.

These Dead Sea caves have to date given up a number of rich finds. In addition to the bronze sheets, in this same area archaeologists also found a parchment scroll with a Hebrew text of the Book of Isaiah, plus several other early Biblical manuscripts. An organized search in these caves is now being made, in the hope of finding other old records.

NEW NEIGHBORS

By

Sid Seeman

ASKY SURVEY is presently being made by the National Geographic Society and the Palomar Observatory which is unveiling the most exciting array of new stars and new systems of stars, many of which are aggregations similar to those of the Milky Way of our own sun and solar system. They show a tendency to shape into clusters, and astronomers are of the opinion that there are probably clusters within clusters within clusters.

These studies are being made on Palomar Mountain with the use of the huge 48-inch Schmidt telescope camera. All visible objects in space, out as far as an average distance of 2,000 billion billion miles, are recorded on supersensitive film. Items of especial interest located with the Schmidt camera are subject to the special scrutiny of Palomar's 200-inch Hale telescope.

SCRATCH ONE ASTEROID

Trapped on the dread penal ship, Brent found a way to escape. First, you went to the library and got a book. Then —



A monster lurked in every cell, and Yalta was alone with them—in space



By Willard Hawkins

THE PENAL ship Verulin, en route from Venus to Ceres, carried as motley an array of ruffians as could have been gathered by combing the spaceways: pirates from the notorious Arcturus raiding fleets; hunga-hunga addicts—sniffers of the forbidden pollen of that Martian shrub which turns men into homicidal maniacs; smugglers and dealers in contraband; green-skinned Venusian procurers; leathery Martian pyromaniacs

and bloodsuckers; thieves, murderers, rapists, renegades, and swindlers of every variety. These were the dregs of criminality, assembled through the months from Venus, Earth, Mars, and their satellites for shipment to the penal colonies on a few bleak planets set aside for that purpose.

The Verulin was overcrowded. With accommodations for two hundred and fifty prisoners, it carried three hundred and seventy-five. This necessitated doubling up in fully half the cramped cells. Warden-Captain Van Tassel deplored this. He was a hard man, as befitted his responsibility, and did not mind the discomfort to his passengers. But locking two men of opposite propensity together was likely to lead to trouble. Either they would get along well and start plotting escape or some other deviltry, or they wouldn't get along and would vent their dislike in mayhem. It was a certainty, under these conditions, that the vessel would arrive at its destination with fewer live passengers than it had started with.

Being a man who took pride in the

safe delivery of his cargo, Van Tassel avoided this shrinkage as far as possible by pairing off prisoners whose records revealed some slight regard for human life. Perhaps it was because Brent Agar looked intelligent that he thrust an unwelcome cell-mate upon him, despite the card in the files which described Agar as a hardened criminal with a record of robbery, piracy, and the murder of at least two Spaceways Patrol officers.

The customary platoon of guards accompanied him when he unlocked the cell door to announce, "I'm putting this man in with you." While two guards kept their blasters aimed at the cell inmate, a third removed the handcuffs from a hulking brute in a one-piece gray convict uniform. A fourth guard helped to push the newcomer into the cell.

As the door clicked into place, automatically locking, the prisoner seated on his narrow cot in the cell raised sullen eyes. "Two of us in a lousy hole that a Martian cliff-borer could hardly turn around in?"

"That's right," the Captain responded. "And you'll make the best of it—or else." He paused a moment, then went on, "Behave yourselves and you'll get privileges. One hour a day in the exercise corridor. One book at a time from the library. Shower bath every three days. Smokes. Three meals each twenty-four-hour period."

"Now, ain't that soft!" sneered the prisoner. "Free beer and pukey water on top of all that?"

"Beer or Venusian pulque once a day," the Captain replied imperturbably. He added significantly, "As long as you both behave. Any complaints and you'll get your solitary, all right. But your privileges will consist of one meatball every three days. Just that."

THE PLATOON, led by the Captain, clumped down the narrow corridor. The cell-mate who had been forced upon Brent Agar stood motionless, leaning against the side wall, his head thrust forward by the low ceiling. When the heavy door at the end of the passage clanged shut, he turned bleary but ingratiating eyes toward Brent and spoke in a husky voice.

"You heard what he said about a meatball every three days? Lemme tell you something. Them ain't meat. They're just a hard lump like marble. You hold one in your mouth and suck till it's gone. It keeps you alive, but you're just as hungry as ever."

Brent grunted.

"Guess we ought to know each other," the big man continued, "seeing we'll be together a powerful long time. Takes a good three months to reach where we're headed. My name's Pete Monson." He waited expectantly, then added, "What's your'n?"

"Agar. Brent Agar."

"Agar. Didn't you used to be with the Haywood outfit?"

"No."

Ignoring the curt response, Pete mused, "I guess you ain't the one. Don't seem like Agar was the name, after all. Mind if I set down?"

Brent did not answer; neither did he offer to make room on the cot. Pete Monson crowded his bulk into the space between Brent and the head wall. He glanced up at two overhead sockets. "Anyways," he observed cheerfully, "we won't have to sleep together. They's another bunk fits in them holes. They'll prob'ly bring it before lights-out."

"Look, wise guy," Brent exclaimed irritably, "I'm tryin' to think. You keep running off at the mouth and I'll find a way to close it."

Monson looked hurt rather than of-

fended. He had the manner of a clumsy St. Bernard, ingratiating—over-anxious to please.

"Thinkin'," he ventured in a tone of respect, as for a form of activity beyond his comprehension. "What's to think about, in a place like this?"

"How to get out, for one thing," Brent retorted contemptuously. "You don't figure I'm gonna let them bury me in one of those hell-camps without putting up a fight, do you?"

"There ain't no way out," Pete declared with stolid finality.

"There's always a way—for a guy with brains and guts."

Brent refused to say more than, but by the time the vessel had achieved full acceleration and had been on its way some three day-periods, Pete Monson's persistent good nature had worn his reserve down to the point of permitting a few confidences. The factor which seemed to impress him most in Pete's favor was the latter's admission that he belonged to the Arcturus gang.

"I kinda thought they'd spring me," the big fellow said wistfully. "But I guess I ain't worth the trouble. They're a big outfit."

"They're big, all right," Brent conceded. "Just about an empire in themselves. But it's like you said—if you're dope enough to get trapped, you ain't worth trying to spring. They got a million dumb clucks to do their dirty work."

"Yeah—that's for a fact," Pete acknowledged despondently.

"You don't know a putrid thing about the organization—except the crew of the vessel or whatever gang you happened to be working with. Who's at the head of it—tell me that?"

"Gosh—I dunno."

"YOU NOR anybody else. But there's a mastermind back of

it—bound to be. Look how neat they've got things organized. Used to be that space pirates were everywhere. Got so a passenger or freight vessel couldn't blast off from Earth or Venus or Mars without running into a raider—maybe a fleet of them. They'd strip the vessel—wipe out passengers and crew or hold them for ransom. Nothing short of an armed convoy could get through. The shipping companies were being forced out of business."

"Them was the days," observed Pete dreamily. "I 'member when I was a young punk—"

"Now what?" demanded Brent, ignoring him. "You ever hear of a regular line vessel being attacked any more?"

"I guess there ain't no more pirate fleets," Pete surmised. "Just scattered smuggling outfits like I was with."

"You mean you worked with the Arcturus organization and didn't know it was carrying on piracy on a bigger scale than ever?" There was scorn in Brent's question.

"But you just said—"

"I said you don't *hear* of regular line vessels being attacked. That's why I say there's a mastermind back of the whole thing—somebody that knows how to tie up all this indiscriminate piracy into a neat package. Somebody smart enough to turn piracy into a protection racket. The old ways were killing the goose that laid the golden egg. He put a stop to them."

"Who did?"

"This guy I'm telling about," was the impatient retort. "I don't know who. Nobody knows. He's smart enough to stay in the background. The way it is now, the big shipping and passenger lines pay tribute and their vessels go through without being molested. They pay it to the Planetary Insurance League or Spaceways Pro-

tection Service, Limited, or maybe to TVML."

"What's that stand for?"

"Terra - Venus - Mars - Incorporated. There's a dozen firms in the racket—all tied together, if you ask me. It sounds legal enough, but just the same, it's tribute. You kick in—or else. The money finds its way into the coffers of the old pirate gang, and they'll wipe any concern from the spaceways, big or little, if it doesn't come through."

"Jeepers," Pete exclaimed admiringly. "The guy that thought that up must be mighty smart."

"Took brains," admitted Brent. "I've always been a loner, but if I was to book up with any outfit it would be the Arcturus bunch."

It was Brent who insisted upon Pete's making use of their library privilege. "But I can't hardly read," the big fellow protested. "What could I do with a book?"

Brent growled, "It's one way to get out of this stinkin' cell, ain't it?"

PRISONERS whose behavior was exemplary were permitted to make the trip under guard to the small room adjoining the Warden-Captain's office which contained the ship's limited library. Few prisoners availed themselves of the privilege; most of those who did were actuated by the motive Brent expressed. It gave them a chance to escape the monotony of the cell. Brent made the trip daily. Sometimes he even read or dipped into the book he brought back. Pete succumbed to the blandishments of literature when he stumbled onto a well-thumbed edition of an ancient classic, *The Terror of the Spaceways*. It dealt with the exploits of an incredible superman and was profusely illustrated in color. Daily he carried this book back to the library, placed it on the shelf, then solemnly retrieved it and returned to

his cell to pore over the pictures. When Brent discovered what was going on, he put a stop to this procedure. "You want the guards to get wise to what you're doing?" Thereafter, Pete alternated his favorite with another illustrated volume, *Jungle Life on Prehistoric Venus*; but *The Terror* remained his favorite.

For some reason for which no explanation was vouchsafed the passengers, the Verulin maneuvered to a brief stop on Earth. The first intimation of this pause was the word passed along the cell doors to prepare for deceleration. Brent cursed. "If I'd known in time, I'd have been ready to make a break for it."

"You wouldn't have got nowheres," Pete assured him.

"The hell I wouldn't. I've got plenty of ideas about escaping from this dung-heap."

"Wonder what we're stopping for."

"Maybe they're going to take on more prisoners. Two of us in a stinking cell isn't enough. They're going to crowd us in thicker."

But there was no evidence to support this theory when, after some twenty hours, the vessel again took off. The prisoners were confined strictly to their cells during the stay in port, but after take-off the grim routine of the prison ship was resumed.

Pete returned from his first trip to the library following the earth-stop with his treasured *Terror of the Spaceways* and an air of suppressed excitement. He hotlied up his news until the guards had locked him in and returned to their post by the cell-block gate; then he burst out, in a hoarse whisper:

"Guess what I seen!"

Brent, trying to sleep in the upper bunk, granted annoyance.

"Hey, Brent, I gotta tell you. They's a dame on board."

"Shuddup."

"But they is!"

"They don't take dames to Ceres—no matter how tough they get."

"No, but this dame ain't—she ain't—" Pete gulped, words failing him. "The door was part way open into the Cap'n's office and I seen her settin' there. Brent, I tell you, she's class."

Brent Agar sat up slowly, running his hands through jet-black hair that had been close-cropped at the start of the voyage.

"Now I've heard everything," he remarked. "There's a dame—a classy dame—making herself at home on a prison ship. Who sold you the stuff?"

"What stuff?"

"The hop. You been biting the pipe."

"No I ain't," returned Pete in an aggrieved voice. "You go see for yourself. She had her back to the door, but she had yella hair and a blue, sorta silky dress, and her leg—her leg—" Pete's voice choked.

"You mean she only had one leg?"

"It was the way she was setting. It was—sorta long and slim and curved. I—" Again Pete gulped, overcome by the recollection. "That's how I knowed she was class."

"I take it back," Brent assured him. "You haven't been smoking hop. Nothing short of hunga-hunga weed'll give a man dreams like you've been having."

PETE WITHDREW in offended silence to the solace of his book.

Later, Brent had his opportunity to make the closely guarded trip to the library. When he returned, Pete eagerly searched his impassive face.

"You seen her?"

Brent shook his head. "I didn't see any one." He climbed into the upper bunk and composed himself with the

heavy volume he had brought back. After an interval he vouchsafed the additional information, "Door was shut."

Pete's countenance fell.

"The door was shut, but—" Brent paused exasperatingly to study the title page of the tome in his hands—"I leaned up tight against it. There were voices—the Captain and some one else."

"Was it—?"

"The other voice sounded like it might be a dame's."

Pete sprang up excitedly, scarcely wincing when he bumped his head against a ceiling beam. "Then you admit I seen her?"

Brent eyed him calmly. "So there's a dame on board. What of it?"

"I dunno," Pete acknowledged. "Only it makes me feel—it's kinda nice to think about."

"Could be—" Brent spoke softly, more to himself than to Pete—"this is the break I've been waiting for."

"Whadda y' mean—break?"

"Suppose one of us got a chance to grab a blaster from the guards—there in the library. He could duck inside, grab the girl, shoot down both guards, and drag her back here."

"Jumpin' rockets, Brent!" expostulated Pete. "The whole ship 'ld be down on us afore we could turn 'round. They'd blast us to cinders. They'd use gas. We wouldn't stand a chance."

"Hold the girl in front of us and what could they do? Whoever she is, she's special. Maybe a relative of the Captain's—or more likely the daughter of some big shot being taken some place off the regular travel routes. He can't risk having her killed or injured. We'd have 'em where we want 'em."

"But—"

"What's the matter? You aren't

chicken-hearted about knocking off a few guards, I hope."

"No, but the dame—she might get hurt."

"So what?" Brent spat contemptuously.

Pete maintained an obstinate silence.

"Come to think of it, I've got a better idea. Instead of bringing her back here and getting us holed up like trapped rats, we'll take her down to the bottom level and force her into one of the tenders. Cut it loose, and we're out in space—with a classy dame to keep us company. Not bad, eh?"

Pete cast about helplessly for a reply. "What makes you think this ship's got a tender?"

"She's bound to have. This is an old converted Q-29. I used to know the Q-29 like a book. There's an automatic elevator in the corridor just outside of the Captain's office. At the bottom of the shaft there's an air-lock with two jet-powered tenders. They use 'em for dropping freight or landing passengers where the ship doesn't make a full stop. Sounds good—eh?"

"Not to me it don't."

"Why not?"

IT WAS several hours before Pete's slow brain came up with the answer. He loomed over the side of Brent's bunk during the sleeping period, when the cell-blocks were drenched in darkness.

"Hey, Brent," he whispered hoarsely, "what's the cruising range of them Q-29 tenders?"

"Let me sleep, you pest."

"But what is it?"

"About ninety thousand miles—maybe a hundred thou."

"You mean we'd cut adrift in a little torpedo that couldn't take us more'n a hundred thousand miles even if we knowed where to steer?"

"Shuddup and let me sleep."

"But Brent, that don't make sense. And this dame—"

"Shuddup!"

Pete returned to his troubled bunk.

"You chuckle-headed boob," Brent told him the next morning. "You don't think I'd pull this stunt till we're close enough to some landing to get away with it, do you?"

"What good's it going to do us if we have to land on Ceres anyways?"

Brent ignored the question. He was looking intently at the cover of the heavy book obtained from the library—a legal tome dealing with interplanetary law. He ran his fingers over the binding, near the backbone, then thrust it toward Pete. "Feel that."

Pete did so. "It's kinda lumpy," he ventured.

Brent began methodically working his fingernail along the edge of the leather which extended part way over the heavy board covers. He succeeded in loosening the edge sufficiently to enable him to rip the leather loose.

Within a neatly carved hollow in the cover boards nestled a key. Brent pried it from its resting place.

"What the—" He paused abruptly and moved to the cell door. There was barely room between bars for him to thrust his arm through and twist his wrist sufficiently to insert the key in the lock. The key fitted but refused to turn.

Withdrawing it cautiously, he sat on the bunk.

"Some smart crook planted this book in the library," he surmised. "Maybe bribed a guard. Maybe it was on some other trip and something went wrong."

"Might be be's waiting till the time comes to use it," suggested Pete.

"Yeah. Could be. Well, his tough luck is my gain."

"But it won't unlock nothing," reminded Pete.

"This bird must have figured how to make the key fit." Brent picked up the book and ran his fingers over the front cover. Then he opened it up as he had opened the back. It, too, concealed a piece of metal—a thin, sharp file.

"Our friend knew all the angles," he grinned. "That lock is as good as open."

By scraping the surface clean and moistening the original glue, he managed to restore the book to its original appearance. Then he went to work with the file.

Fashioning a key that would fit the cell lock was a matter of tedious trial and error. Occasionally Pete would inquire in a troubled tone, "Getting anywhere?" Brent rarely vouchsafed more than a grunt.

HE COMPLETED the key shortly after lights went on to mark their fourth day out from Earth. Pete eyed his success in unlocking the door with distinct lack of enthusiasm.

"You still figure on kidnaping that dame?"

"What's the matter? Going chicken—now that our chance has come?"

"I don't mind bashing guards, but a dame—"

"For cripes' sake, forget the dame."

Pete lapsed into moody silence.

Brent stretched, then grinned provocatively. "Matter of fact, your lady friend is going to be a lot more useful to us alive than dead. She's going to get us out of here."

"You ain't even talked to her. Besides, she wouldn't—"

By degrees, Brent divulged his plan. He had listened again at the door of the Warden-Captain's headquarters adjoining the library, this time acquiring an earful. The girl, as he had

surmised, was a special passenger. She was to be dropped at TS-482, one of those fabulous private worlds maintained by immensely wealthy clubs and individuals in space. "She's a niece, or something, of the big shot who owns the place," Brent explained. "They'll swing close enough to discharge her in a tender so she can make her landing."

"You mean she can pilot one of them things?"

"Seems so. That's how they came to be arguing so loud. Captain Van Tassel wants to send a pilot along to make sure she'll land safely. She claimed she could handle the tender alone."

"How'd it come out?"

"Don't know. But if there's a pilot, we'll take care of him."

"How d'ya mean we?"

"When that tender cuts loose, I'm going to be stowed away in the freight compartment. Suit yourself about coming along."

"Jeepers, Brent, we'd never make it."

"I'll make it."

"But even with this door unlocked we'd have to pass the cell-block gate. It's kept locked and they's two guards—"

"Yeah? Thanks for putting me wise."

"You mean you got a way figured to get past them guards?"

"I've already told you too much. Maybe you're fixing to squeal."

Pete's voice was reproachful. "You know I wouldn't do that."

"You threatened something like it a while back."

"That was only if the dame— Look, Brent, you swear you ain't gonna hurt her?"

"Maybe you'd better come along just to make sure."

"I'll come. I'll do anything you say."

"Stay ready, then. Because the way I got it, they're going to cast the tender loose tonight, about an hour before lights-on. That means we've got to stow ourselves in it before then."

"Jeepers, I don't see how we're gonna make it."

"You'll find out."

Lights had been out some two hours when Pete was wakened from a troubled sleep by the barely perceptible click of a closing steel door. He sat up, aware of a shadowy figure moving past him.

"Brent," he whispered, "that you?"

"Keep quiet."

"Where you been?"

"Just prowling."

"You been out there?"

"Shuddup!"

THERE WAS silence throughout the cell-block for the next few minutes—silence except for the snoring of many sleepers and a hissing noise suggestive of escaping steam.

After an interval, Pete's hoarse whisper demanded, "What's that noise?"

"The hose. Be ready to make a break when the guards go past. Keep close to me—understand?"

Silently, Pete digested this. Brent evidently referred to the hose that hung coiled at the end of the cell-block. It was used for washing down floors and—on occasion—for drenching recalcitrant prisoners.

A sudden yell pierced his mental groping for the meaning of all this. "Hey! I'm drowning! What the hell!" The shouted protest came from the farthest cell in their row.

Pandemonium broke loose. Other convicts joined their yells to the outcry. There were shouted commands for silence from the guards and the clang of the cell-block gate as they flung it

open and dashed inside to quell the disturbance. As they plunged past, Brent breathed "Come!" and pushed their cell door open.

The two men scuttled along the narrow passageway, scarcely more than shadows in the gloom—their footfalls drowned in the cursing and yelling. They slipped through the open gate and sped through the familiar corridor to the prison library. Pete lunged toward the door leading to the Captain's headquarters, but Brent shunted him off.

"This way." Pete found himself in an angled corridor. The next instant they were descending in a cramped elevator, and then stepping out into the uncertainty of complete darkness.

"Hang onto me," Brent commanded. "I know about where the air-lock should be." He felt his way cautiously. "Here it is." He fumbled for a moment, locating the lever. The door swung open in response to its automatic mechanism. They crowded inside. It took Brent a few precious minutes to locate the closing lever. Then the door eased into its socket, shutting out the distant clamor which had faintly reached their ears.

"Think they've missed us?" demanded Pete.

"Don't know. They may not look in our cell." Brent was feeling for a switch. He found it and the chamber was suddenly visible.

The lock was an oval-shaped tube in which, side by side, reposed the two tenders—twenty-foot cigar-shaped vessels of dull black metal with shoulder-like protuberances containing the propulsion units. Brent made his way, crouching because of the low ceiling, to the door of the nearest tender. The opening was scarcely large enough to permit him to crawl inside. After a moment, he poked his head out.

"This is the one. Turn out the light before you squeeze in."

It was no easy matter for Pete to insinuate his heavy frame through the narrow door; it was even more difficult for him to squeeze past the double pilot's seat into the freight compartment behind.

"How d'ya know she'll use this one?" he demanded, when his panting from the effort had subsided.

"Her luggage is already in. That's what makes it so crowded."

Pete verified this statement. Exploring hands located two foot lockers and a dozen bags of assorted shapes and sizes. "She must be figurin' to make a long stay of it."

"Dames always take a lot of junk," returned Brent. "Get settled. We'll be a long time waiting."

When they were stretched out at full length, he demanded, "Something's gouging me in the ribs; what you got stuffed in your blouse? Well, I'll be damned," he snorted disgustedly. "A book!"

"I kinda like to look at them pictures," Pete defended.

They waited tensely in the darkness.

"That sure was something," Pete observed presently. "Just like everything was greased for us. Wonder how that bore got turned on. Sure was a lucky break."

Brent's body quivered with suppressed mirth. "Man, you sure are dumb."

"You mean you turned it on?"

"What do you think? All I had to do was sneak down the aisle and push the hose nozzle into the last cell, where it would flood the bunks. Then I turned it on—just enough to get things soaked by the time I got back. Breaks! Hell, if you want breaks in this man's universe, you've got to make 'em."

PETE WOKE with a start. "What's that!" he exclaimed in a hoarse

whisper. Brent's hand closed over his mouth.

There were voices outside, then a faint radiance as the door of their craft opened.

"Thanks, Captain Van, for everything you've done for me," came the clear voice of a girl, as she climbed into the pilot's seat.

The gruff voice of the Warden-Captain responded, "I still say I ought to have my head examined for letting you go by yourself. Got your instructions clear?"

"I couldn't possibly go wrong. I'm to circle three times and decelerate to 700 M.P.H. before breaking through the atmosphere seal, then keep circling till I spot the landing field."

"Good luck, then. The chief engineer will expel you from the lock the instant we're tangent. You're to glide free in space for twenty seconds before cutting in your own power."

"I'll remember. Thanks."

The girl had a clear, musical voice. She did not sound afraid.

The door closed and there was darkness, save for a soft glow from the instrument panel. After what seemed an interminable wait, the stowaways experienced a sudden, indescribable sense of motion, accompanied by creeping cold. Even the scientifically insulated hull of the small craft was not fully proof against the fridity of space.

The next moment there was a deafening blast as the jet propulsion chambers roared into activity.

Brent Agar gathered himself into a crouching position which enabled him to peer through the openings in the upper part of the freight compartment doors. Pete followed his example. They could see nothing except star-studded blackness limning the helmeted figure in the pilot's seat. There was now no sensation of motion beyond a slow

upward gliding of the star field. Brent fixed in mind some of the constellations and when, after an interval, these same formations appeared again, he knew they had made the first complete circuit of their objective. The second reappearance was longer in coming and the third longer still. The girl pilot was decelerating, all right.

They must then have entered an atmosphere, because the roar of the jet propulsion underwent an indescribable alteration, somewhat as if a muffler had been applied. The star field also changed, as if dimmed by an intangible veil.

THEY WERE now circling a private world—one of those inevitable developments following man's conquest of space. The fabulous multi-billionaire Fabian Moncrief was the first recorded person to establish his villa on a planetoid. He installed an atom-drive which maneuvered the huge rock—perhaps half a mile in diameter—to within a few thousand miles of Mars, where it took up an orbit around the planet. On this satellite, a crew of workmen erected a plastic dome which was filled with air transported in compressed form from Earth and within which was erected a palatial residence surrounded by exotic vegetation. In this sky palace Moncrief entertained lavishly until the dome was smashed by a meteor.

In the course of years, other experiments of the same kind were tried. The planetary governments eventually put a stop to the transportation of their atmosphere, but development of processes for manufacturing synthetic air overcame this handicap. Then came the discovery of seal-gas, which first came into use in mining operations on Ceres and some of its neighbors.

Seal-gas, easily manufactured, when released into the atmosphere, through

some peculiarity of ionization, rose to the surface and formed a bubble which prevented air, or other gases, from escaping into space. If pierced by a vessel or meteor, it immediately closed up, forming a perfect seal for the atmosphere within. Moreover, with a variation of the chemical properties and amount of this seal-gas envelope the atmospheric pressure could be regulated.

With the development of seal-gas, the establishment of pleasure villas in space became vastly stimulated. For a few million dollars, those who desired could have a small villa built in any form and towed into an orbit around one of the major planets, or possibly a convenient moon. For several billions of dollars, an asteroid could be leased or purchased from the Interplanetary Federation and propelled to the desired location, where its development into a garden spot was limited only by the wealth and desires of the tycoon or group of billionaires involved. Many of these private worlds were oases of unbelievable beauty and luxury.

BEYOND the fact that they were now circling such a sphere, Brent Agar and Pete Monson could form no idea of it. In all probability, however, because its orbit was so far from Earth, it would prove to be a planetoid rather than a manufactured satellite.

Brent tensed himself, keeping his eyes on the pilot, while she circled the sphere, evidently searching for a landing field. They passed alternately from light to darkness, but now that they were moving in an atmosphere, even the darkness was mitigated.

Presently she craned her neck as if she had sighted what she wanted and there was a marked deceleration. At that instant, Brent pushed open the

swinging doors and quietly grasped the girl's arms.

"I'll take over from here, sister."

She stifled a scream. The craft gave a wild lurch. She turned a white, startled face up toward Brent as he lifted her bodily into the single seat beside the one she had occupied.

Defly, Brent clambered into the pilot's seat and grasped the controls, bringing the craft out of its dizzying plunge.

"You—you—!" The girl could do little more than gasp, for the moment. Impulsively, her hand dived toward her belt. Brent was too quick for her. When her hand came up, both it and the blaster were clasped in his muscular fist.

"I'll take that," he said briefly, wrenching the weapon away from her.

"You're a convict!" she exclaimed. "You'll regret this."

"Looky here, Brent!" Pete had managed to pick himself up and work his way forward through the confusion of baggage that shifted while the craft was momentarily out of control; his tone was threatening. "You said you wasn't going to harm—"

"Who's harming the lady?" Brent asked suavely. "I'm just making sure we pull a safe landing."

"How did you get here?" the girl demanded. She had recovered her composure with remarkable speed. "It won't do you any good. My uncle will hold you for the authorities."

When this brought no response, she added, "The landing field is on the right side. I was just dropping down when you—"

Brent was peering intently at the terrain below. "Kind of think I'll land here. Haug on, sister; it may be rough."

It was rough! The landing wheels took the first impact, but a boulder finished them off, and the craft

bumped on its belly for some two hundred yards before it came to rest. If earth gravity had prevailed, they would have been ground to fragments.

Pete leaned over them, mumbling invectives from a bleeding mouth. The girl was limp and trembling when Brent lifted her from the seat and guided her through the hatch. The insignificant gravity made it difficult at first for her to gain a footing.

"Now, what did you do that for?" she demanded, when all three stood outside. "The landing field—"

"Your uncle might not be in a welcoming mood for strangers," Brent told her. "He was expecting you, of course?"

The girl did not answer. She was surveying the bleak landscape with an expression of horror.

THIS PHASE of the asteroid was certainly no garden spot. It might have been the peak of a craggy earth mountain—a mere heap of granite-like rocks, unrelieved by vegetation. The air was clear and balmy. One of the advantages of the ionized seal-gas layer was its heat-insulating property.

"I don't think he was," Brent observed, answering his own last question. "If Uncle what's-his-name invited you to visit him, he'd have sent a space yacht to pick you up. The way it was, you had to induce some vessel coming this way to drop you off."

"And it would be just my luck to pick a convict ship," she returned bitterly. "Now I'll have to walk to the other side."

"Not yet," Brent told her amiably. "You're staying with us."

Pete had been staring at the girl with mute admiration. "Now, looky here," he interposed abruptly. "You said—"

"Waiting isn't going to hurt her,"

Brent countered. "Let's find out something about this uncle before he learns that he's entertaining guests."

"You don't suppose," the girl responded contemptuously, "that we could break through that ionized layer and circle this globe without his knowing it?"

"You've a point there, sister. In that case, we'll need something to give us a bargaining edge."

She gazed at him levelly. "That means I'm held as a hostage?"

"You catch on quick."

"Now, wait a minute!" Pete began. Brent impatiently cut him short.

"She's not going to get hurt—unless she asks for it—so stow the argument." He studied a rock outcropping a few hundred feet beyond. "Let's hop over there—see what kind of shelter it offers."

They covered the distance in long, loping strides—the kind a spaceman acquires from spending much time on low-gravity terrain. The girl controlled her movements almost as adeptly as her companions; she was clearly no novice. All, of course, were helped in maintaining equilibrium by the magnetized shoe soles which were standard equipment on the prison ship, as on the majority of space vessels.

The outcropping was seamed and irregular. "I was hoping for a cave," Brent said, "but this will do." He indicated a crevice which extended some twenty feet into the rock. "Duck in there."

The order was directed at the girl. She drew herself up proudly. "I don't take orders from convicts."

"This," responded Brent, gesturing with the miniature blaster he had filched from her, "is what gives the orders."

Pete thrust his bulk belligerently between the two. "You ain't gonna use

that on her," he announced gruffly. "Not while I'm around."

"Which won't be long, at this rate," Brent informed him. But he lowered the blaster. "Better be reasonable—both of you. Until I know where we stand, Miss Clement is going to stay out of sight."

"How did you learn my name?" the girl demanded.

"Heard the Warden-Captain talking to you. You're Vesta Clement, and you uncle's name is Batterby—or something like that."

"Ballentine," she corrected. "Wade Ballentine."

"All right. If he shows up, I want to talk with him first. I'll give you your choice. You can give your word to stay out of sight, or you can submit to being tied and gagged. Which'll it be?"

She turned impulsively to Pete. "You wouldn't let him do that!"

"I sure wouldn't, Miss," he said, glowering at Brent.

The latter regarded his fellow convict coolly. "The blaster will take care of Pete. What do you say?"

SHE LOOKED uncertainly from one to the other, then replied reluctantly, "Rather than make it hard for Pete, I—I'll give my word."

"Don't you do it, Miss!" Pete urged.

Brent ignored him. "And what," he asked, "is your word good for?"

Her eyes met his with withering contempt. "I imagine it's worth more than a convict's."

"Better be," was the laconic response. "Remember, I've still got the blaster. Pete, help me move Miss Clement's luggage."

The transfer of the girl's belongings from the wrecked tender to the crevice required only a few minutes. After this, they had nothing to do except wait, while the sun crept higher in

the sky. Vesta Clement wore a wrist watch and with its aid Brent estimated the rotation of the globe to be at the rate of something like one-third of an earth day—perhaps eight hours—giving each hemisphere a day and night of approximately four hours each. But the cultivated opposite hemisphere had been brightly illuminated during the brief glimpse he obtained of it before he wrenched the controls from the girl.

"What if no one don't come?" demanded Pete presently.

"Then I'll pay Uncle Wade a visit," returned Brent. "But I'd prefer—Oh, oh! Here comes something."

Over the horizon appeared a strange-looking craft. It was little more than a kite-shaped wing supporting a two-seated chassis. A faint vapor trail indicated some sort of propulsion. "Low-gravity airplane," commented Brent. "They're used a lot on asteroids. We call them floaters."

The floater dropped lightly beside the space tender and three men stepped out—a big-framed Terrestrial in tropical helmet and shorts and two green-skinned Venusians, clad only in trunks, with carrying pouches slung from their shoulders.

The trio made a close examination of the wrecked space tender, then turned speculatively toward the rock outcropping in which the girl and two companions were concealed.

"Time to show ourselves," Brent observed to Pete. He gestured with the blaster significantly before tucking it in his blouse. "Keep out of sight, Miss Clement."

"I gave my word," she responded with disdain.

The convicts moved slowly to meet the trio of planetoid dwellers. When some five yards separated them, the Terrestrial waved them peremptorily to a halt. His swarthy features were

bandsome hut marked by a sullen expression. Without preliminaries, he demanded:

"Who the devil are you?"

"Sorry to poach on your private world," Brent responded, with a shade of insolence, "but we had to make an emergency landing."

"I asked who you are."

"Brent Agar and—" Brent indicated his companion—"Pete Monson."

"Convicts?"

"No point in denying it. Escaped from the Verulfin, en route to Ceres."

The asteroid dweller chewed his lips. He had an abrupt, incisive manner; the clipped speech of one accustomed to giving orders.

"Incredible!" he ejaculated. "You couldn't have landed here in a thousand years without a planned trajectory. How did you know this spheroid existed?"

"Just happened on it," Brent replied imperturbably. "We cut loose—and here you were. Lucky for us."

"That's debatable. I don't welcome visitors. Tell me more about yourselves."

BRENT SHRUGGED. "The fact that I'm a con tells it all. They don't send first offenders to Ceres. This last time, I had the bad luck to run into a patrol force just after I'd pulled a diamond robbery on Deimos."

"Was this man with you?"

"No. Pete is big time—belongs to the Arcturus gang. They rounded him up with the Castrox crew when a space patrol caught 'em in a smuggling operation."

The spheroid tycoon glanced at Pete with more interest than he had heretofore evinced. "The Castrox, eh? Did they get all of the crew?"

"All except the third officer—a greenie named Kor Hoobla—and a shipmate we called Jughead. Then

there was Slim Bagley, but I never knew whether he made it or they blasted him down."

One of the Venusians interposed, gesturing toward the space tender. He spoke an unintelligible jargon in which, however, the words *Kor Ballentine*—*Kor* being a form of address—and *Q-29*—the insignia painted on the hull of the dejected vessel—were recognizable. The man addressed as Ballentine seemed to reach a decision.

"Stay here till I decide what to do with you. Don't attempt to cross to the other side. We're setting up a patrol, and the guards will have orders to blast you on sight."

"How about feeding us?" Brent inquired.

"I'll send you supplies." Ballentine and the Venusians exchanged a few words, whereat one of the latter took an instrument from his carrying pouch and pointed it toward the two convicts.

"Walk toward me," the master demanded, and when Pete and Brent hesitantly complied, "Now, right-face. Walk slowly. Now the other way. That's enough. Don't forget what I said about staying here."

The three planetoid dwellers returned to their floater.

"What did he make us do that for?" demanded Pete, as the low-gravity plane soared away.

"Taking our pictures," Brent informed him. "I gather he knew about the roundup of your outfit—wants to check if we told the truth. Hey! What's wrong?"

Vesta Clement stood just inside the crevice, her back to the granite wall as if for support. Her face was white—her eyes terrified.

"That man!" she gasped. "The man out there couldn't be my uncle!"

"The greenie called him Ballentine. When did you last see your uncle?"

"I never saw him—not even a picture."

"Then how do you know it isn't him?"

"Because he'd be so much older. He was my father's half-brother. And Father died at seventy-four."

"He didn't expect you," Brent commented. "I guessed as much. You took a long chance. What made you think you'd be welcome?"

"Father had letters from him, urging us to come for a long visit. Of course they were written a good many years ago. Father wouldn't consider it—he was happy in his work as a professor in Pan-Pacific University. But he made me promise to visit Uncle after he was gone. I—I thought I'd surprise him."

"Maybe this is a son."

THE GIRL brightened; then the worried expression returned. "But Father always spoke of him as a bachelor. True, they hadn't seen each other since boyhood. Father went into teaching while his half-brother joined an exploring party that struck a fabulously rich mineral deposit on some asteroid. He was reputed to be one of the wealthiest men in the system. But—" she hesitated— "Well, the story is that he had this planetoid towed into an orbit around Earth and developed it into a luxury home for a woman he was desperately in love with. But she jilted him, and he lived here alone, practically cutting himself off from mankind, except for such servants as he needed. That's why it's hard to believe he'd have a son."

The air vehicle which had visited them previously—or one like it—appeared as the sun was setting. Without bothering to land, the two Venusians piloting it dropped a couple of cartoons, then circled back the way they

had come. Pete carried the boxes to the shelter.

The master of Terrestrial Satellite No. 482 had not stinted them as to food. There was a supply sufficient for several days. Both men partook of a better meal than they had enjoyed at any time on the prison ship. Even Vesta displayed a healthy appetite. Later, when darkness brought with it a perceptible chill, she opened one of her lockers and took out a sleeping bag. "You may as well have these," she remarked, tossing them a couple of blankets.

"Thanks, sister," Brent acknowledged. "Hope you don't mind if Pete and I sleep across the entrance of your boudoir."

"Is that to protect me—or prevent me from escaping?"

"Might be both," responded Brent.

They slept through the four-hour night and well into the next day. Pete was investigating the contents of the food cartons when Vesta emerged from her recess.

"How long," she demanded, "am I condemned to stay in hiding?"

"Not long," Brent told her. "I've got plans for you."

"Oh, you have!" Her antagonism flared.

"It's about time," he went on reflectively, "for you to pay a visit to Uncle Wade—or whoever he may be."

"And be blasted as soon as I approach the other side?"

"They won't blast you. Their orders don't cover a girl. Your story is that we kept you prisoner, but you managed to escape."

"But I don't want to see this man. He isn't my uncle. He looks—sinister. I'm afraid of him."

Brent studied the label of a food can. "Rather stay with a couple of sons? Thanks for the compliment."

The girl flushed. "There isn't much choice, is there?"

"You'll be safe enough," Brent told her. "Whoever he is, he won't dare harm you. Too many people know you made this trip. Van Tassel is certain to check—he'll want to know you landed safely."

"Am I supposed to believe you're thinking only of my welfare?"

"Not quite, sister. If this Ballentine is phony, I'd like to know it. Once in his house, you'll be in a position to learn something and report to me."

"You!" disdainfully. "A criminal of the lowest kind! I presume diamond robbery is just one of your lesser crimes. Why should I report to you?"

"Because," Brent replied, unruffled, "for the time being, we're in the same boat. You may need us before we get out of this mess."

"Oh, indeed!" she responded sarcastically. Nevertheless, after a moment's silence she asked, "How and when do I make this report?"

"I'll contact you. Whenever you can, walk along the strip bordering the landing field."

"You can't go there. The guards have orders—"

"They won't stop me. Better start now, while there's light enough for the patrol to see you. Take it slowly."

SHE PACKED a small traveling case with articles she would be most likely to need. Before starting across the barren rock field, she brushed Pete's hand lightly with her own.

"Bye, Pete," she smiled. "Thanks for all you've tried to do for me."

They watched her disappear over the horizon in long, gliding leaps.

"Jeepers!" murmured Pete, in a tone of awe. "She's sure nice. Pretty, too—just like them television dames!" He glanced reprovingly at his compan-

ion. "You hadn't oughta treated her so mean."

"Softie!" was the disgusted response.

It was not until the following day period that they learned of Vesta's safe arrival. A floater dropped down at the entrance of the crevice. One of the green-skinned occupants announced, with the characteristic inability of his race to pronounce sibilants:

"Bring out Mitthy Clemen' bag. Do quick."

"Help yourthelf," Brent mocked, without rising.

The Venusian produced his blaster. "You load," he commanded.

Lazily, Brent gained his feet. "Since you put it that way," he conceded, "perhaps we do need the exercise."

When the plane had been loaded, one of the Venusians tossed Brent a square envelope before they soared away. The enclosure read:

To Pete or Brent:

Kindly send my luggage by the hearers of this note. Sorry (?) to give you the slip, but you had no right to hold me prisoner. My poor uncle, it seems, died ten years ago. But Wade Ballentine, his adopted son, has been very kind. He urges me to remain here, but I must not impose on his hospitality.

He was relieved to learn the details of our arrival. Naturally, he found it hard to believe that you could have located the plane-toid by mere chance.

Wade did not tell me what he intends to do with you but says he will soon reach a decision.

V. C.

P. S.: You may as well keep the blankets.

Brent glanced up with a grin.

"Thanks, sister. I did that little thing, but this makes it legal."

Pete sighed with relief. "I'm sure glad things turned out all right for her. You had me worried about that guy being a phony."

"He's still a phony for my money," Brent rejoined. He studied the letter. "One thing certain—she's in a tight spot."

"How you make that out? She says he's treating her fine."

"The letter had to pass his inspection. But look at the implications. TS-482 is an Earth satellite. Under planetary law, that makes it subject to Terrestrial statutes. If her uncle died, his estate should have been probated. Even if he left everything to an adopted son, why weren't the other heirs notified? There's something irregular here, and this Ballentine—adopted son or not—won't dare let Vesta go back where she might stir up trouble."

Pete's eyes bulged. "You think he'd—?"

"I'm thinking what I'd do in his place." Brent glanced toward the hattered space tender. "Wouldn't be a bad idea to see what we can do toward putting that pile of junk into condition."

They had scarcely completed an appraisal of the damage to the tender when two Venusian-manned floaters landed beside them. The green-skinned occupants gestured the Earth-men back. "Now what?" muttered Brent.

Methodically, the new arrivals attached cables to the nose and tail of the tender. Then both floating craft rose in the air, with the tender suspended beneath, and towed it over the horizon.

"We couldn't have got nowheres in it, anyway," Pete observed philosophically.

"That's what makes me wonder,"

Brent said slowly. "Why would Balentine bother to send for it?"

THE ROCK field which roughly separated the two hemispheres of the spheroid was pitilessly sun-lighted by day and illuminated during the night period by the floodlights of a succession of patrol floaters. These soared overhead at intervals of not more than two minutes apart, and a moving object as large as a man could hardly have crossed any point in the circle without being spotted.

Since the patrol flyers were on the lookout for moving objects, it is not surprising that no one noted a flat boulder which, in the time required for the sun to progress to meridian, changed its position from the inner to the outer perimeter of the patrol circle.

It was a flat rock large enough to have crushed a man on Earth, but in the low gravity of this private world the chief difficulty Brent Agar experienced was keeping it balanced on his back as he inched along on hands and knees during intervals between patrolling planes.

The man beneath the rock was clad only in shorts. His convict uniform lay sprawled beside Pete just outside the shelter. Stuffed with blankets, the garment looked enough like a sleeping man to pass inspection from a distance. He could only hope it would not be examined more closely during his absence.

In time, the flat rock rested on the edge of a crevice where, discarding his camouflage, Brent eased himself into the depths and soon was making his way through a dense growth of scrub oak.

By nightfall, Brent reached the tree grove bordering the landing field. There was no protecting darkness to aid him here. The field—the entire

landscape—was brilliantly floodlighted.

From the concealment of rank-growing grass within the grove, Brent scrutinized this cultivated section.

It was landscaped in the fashion of wealthy estates on Earth. Imposingly situated on an eminence was the main structure, its architecture reminiscent of the Egyptian style in vogue during the early part of the century. It was partially surrounded by a terraced lawn, with winding paths and flower beds in profusion. The landing field flanked it on the left and was balanced, on the right, by tennis, croquet, and other game courts and by what appeared to be a golf course. Brent wondered fleetingly how such games were played in the low gravity. Probably with specially weighted or magnetized balls.

It was evident that the design had been to create a veritable paradise. Miniature worlds as large as this were rarely developed as individual enterprises, for the cost was astronomical. More often, they were joint ventures of a wealthy group. Here they could congregate as their ancestors congregated in country clubs, entertaining and enjoying themselves in an atmosphere free from restraint.

Yet, as he studied this vista, Brent became conscious of a neglect and desolation. The lawn was lush and untended, the hedges were overgrown and untrimmed. The flower beds had apparently been left to reseed themselves; some had died out. The grove from which he viewed the scene was reverting to a wild state. Only the landing field—an oval stretch perhaps half a mile long and paved with some hard composition—had the appearance of being cared for.

SCATTERED about the field were several floaters, but Brent's eyes

searched in vain for the space tender. It was probably stored in one of the two hangars located at the far end of the field. The more distant hangar, indeed, looked large enough to bouse space vessels of considerable capacity. Grouped around the entrance of the nearest hangar were half a dozen Venusians. Perhaps they were waiting to relieve the border patrol.

The owner's lack of interest in keeping the place up was to Brent's advantage. He had been prepared to keep alert for discovery by caretakers, but as far as he could discern, no one was engaged in that type of work. In fact, the only signs of life, aside from the group in front of the hangar, were at the rear of the main building. There he caught glimpses of children playing and adults going to and fro between the mansion and a row of structures which no doubt housed servants' quarters and various utility operations.

Brent composed himself for a long wait.

He must have dozed, for it did not seem a full four hours before the sun rose, supplanting the floodlights. As they were extinguished, Brent received an unexpected drenching. Without warning, a sprinkling system burst into activity throughout the cultivated portion of the estate. The miniature rainstorm ceased after a few minutes. No doubt the entire process, including extinguishment of the lights, was automatically set in motion by the sun's rays.

It was at least another hour before Brent's patience was rewarded. A white-clad figure which he identified as Vesta emerged from the massive front door of the villa. She hesitated, then walked the length of the veranda and descended to a path leading to the landing field.

She had scarcely reached it when a sun-belmeted figure burst impetu-

ly from the same doorway. The man overtook the girl with a few determined leaps and grasped her possessively by the arm. The two continued across the landing field. The man seemed to be talking vehemently.

As soon as he had made sure the man was Ballentine, Brent withdrew deeper into the thicket. Evidently this was not a propitious occasion for an interview.

The girl and man were almost abreast of him when a peculiar call from the main building caused Wade to turn abruptly. A Venusian stood on the veranda with arm upraised in a beckoning attitude. With an air of annoyance, Ballentine released the girl's arm and loped back to join the Venusian. Both retired into the house.

Softly Brent called, "Miss Clement."

She started, then, recovering her poise, she sauntered toward the edge of the field.

"The bench," Brent directed. "I'm directly behind it."

She sank listlessly to the woven-metal seat. "Wade asked me to wait," she said. "He'll be right back."

"The big boy," Brent commented, "seemed to be putting up quite an argument. What's he trying to get you to do?"

"He wants me to stay here. He's very insistent. Says this should be my home—Uncle would wish it."

"Rather a belated conclusion for him to reach, isn't it? Did he explain why you weren't notified of your uncle's death?"

"He claims he didn't know his foster father had a brother."

BRENT reflected upon this. "Doesn't that sound preposterous?"

"I suppose it does," she acknowledged, in a troubled tone.

"What other Terrestrials are there here?"

"None," she answered promptly. At Brent's startled ejaculation, she added, "Wade explained that in later years my uncle became quite misanthropic—didn't want any of his own race around him. So, out of deference to the old man's memory, Wade retained the custom."

"Well, well!"

"Another thing I thought queer," she went on, "was their having the same name; but Wade explained that Uncle bestowed on him his own name at the time of the adoption."

"I see. How are they treating you?"

"I've nothing to complain of—although some of the Venusians give me an uneasy feeling. Wade seemed to have trouble convincing them that my story was true, but they located some correspondence which verified the relationship."

"They'd have to acknowledge you. So many people, including Warden-Captain Van Tassel, know you came here."

"Wade is welcome to this place!" she burst out vehemently. "I don't like it here—I'm afraid. All I want is to be sent home."

"Stop insisting upon it," Brent told her bluntly. "For your own safety, let Ballentine think you're being persuaded."

"What do you mean—for my safety?"

"The man can't afford to let you leave this place alive. I won't take time to go into that now. There's something more important. Will you help me to get into the house?"

Startled, she half turned toward him, then quickly remembered to resume her listless attitude.

"You don't for a minute believe any of this guff young Wade has been stuffing you with?" Brent demanded.

"I—I— He seems sincere."

"Take it from me," Brent told her bluntly, "he's phony."

This roused her to sarcastic response. "While you—an escaped convict—are the soul of honor."

"Are you going to help me get into that house?"

"Certainly not!"

"Yes, you are. Intuitively, you know I'm right—that you are in deadly peril. Pete and I are your only bope. Here's what I want to you to do: Get hold of some omuta stain—the stuff Venusian women use much as Terrestrials use face powder and rouge. Get the darkest tint you can—more than one tube, if possible. I'd like a razor, too, if you can manage it, so that I can shave off this beard. How about the doors of the big house? Are they locked during the sleep period?"

"I doubt it—so many people live there. But—I could leave my windows open. The apartment they've given me is on the third floor."

"Good girl! And one thing more: Draw me a diagram of the interior. Put in every detail you can supply."

"When do you want these things?"

"The sooner the better. Hide the stuff in the grass back of this bench. I'd better fade now—some greenies are coming this way."

BRENT MADE two trips under the patrol line before he found what he was expecting. Vesta had wrapped in a scrap of green plasticloth two generous tubes of omuta stain and a diagram of the mansion. There was also a brief note:

Sorry I couldn't include a razor. Venusians don't shave and I didn't want to arouse W.'s suspicions. I've informed him that I may decide to stay. Seems vastly relieved.

"Was afraid she couldn't manage the razor," commented Brent, after reading the note to Pete. "Well, let's get busy."

Between periods of poring over his beloved "*Terror of the Spaceways*", Pete had been occupying his time by fashioning crude blades from the food tins included in their provisions. Shaving heavy accumulations of beard with these improvised knives was a tedious and painful task, but with patience it was accomplished.

"Do we have to go to all this trouble?" Pete grumbled.

"You never saw a bearded Venusian, did you?" responded Brent, as he set about methodically smearing his face and body with omuta stain. "Turn around and I'll rub the stuff on your back; then you can do the same for me. It goes into your hair, too."

Their makeup job completed, he surveyed Pete with rueful skepticism. "The color is right, but we couldn't pass close inspection. Still, from a little distance—"

Brent's plan involved one more trip beneath the patrol line. He arrived at the landing field just before lights went on. The only Venusians in sight were a group near the small hangar and some children playing in a fountain. Boldly, Brent walked across the field toward one of the floaters. No one paid any attention.

He had handled similar craft and the controls were simple. Launching the vehicle, he soared away. As he passed overhead, a patrol pilot glanced up. He waved a hand and the Venusian waved back.

At the approach of the floater, Pete hastily dived into the sheltering crevice. He came out of hiding at Brent's call and gingerly climbed into the seat beside the pilot.

After again passing over the patrol line, Brent steered the craft in a wide

sweep which carried him over the functional buildings at the rear of the main villa. These no doubt housed not only the servants' quarters but necessities such as food storage, laundry equipment, and mechanisms controlling temperature, atmospheric pressure, seal-gas maintenance, power, and the like.

"Wish I knew where the lighting system is lodged," Brent mused. He studied the buildings speculatively. It would make things easier if he could plunge the satellite into temporary darkness. Deciding that it would require too much time to accomplish this, he abandoned the idea.

From previous visits, he had learned that a normal night-and-day rotation was simulated on the spheroid by subduing the lights during alternating night periods, even over the landing field. He had timed their arrival to coincide with one of these periods. As he floated their craft to the landing field, the sun disappeared behind a rampart of cliffs which marked the western boundary of the cultivated section. The subdued lighting which followed was comparable to deep twilight. Under its cover, the two men crossed the landing field to the shelter of the tree grove.

"That was easy!" triumphed Pete. "They never 'spected but what we was a coupla greenies."

Brent grunted. "Hope our luck holds." He squinted at the villa, looming in shadowy grandeur. Many of its windows were dark—a few still brightly lighted. The windows of Vesta's apartment, as indicated by the diagram, were among those in darkness.

WHEN EVERYTHING had become as quiet as it was likely to be, the two loped toward the villa. No one challenged them, although they passed a dozen roistering Venusians

who appeared to have been indulging freely in native brews. A moment later, they stood within the concealment of some tall bushes in the shadow of the building.

On this side the only window from which light still shone was on the first floor. Within the room, a number of Venusians were eagerly bending over a game table. The casement windows of Vesta's apartment were open. "Here goes," announced Brent. With a leap that would have carried him perhaps three feet off the ground on Earth, he soared to the third-floor window. A moment later, he was helping Pete through the opening.

According to the diagram, the dark room they had entered must be the living room of the small suite. Brent felt his way to the bedroom door and rapped lightly.

"Yes!" came the sleepy response. "Who is it?"

He spoke in a scarcely audible tone. "We're here."

After a moment, Vesta joined them, vaguely discernible in hastily donned negligee. "What are you going to do?"

"I've been studying that diagram of yours. You've indicated an apartment for 'some kind of an executive' and several secretaries. There's one for Kor Amha, designated as head bookkeeper, and another for a trio of girl stenographers. How did you learn of their duties?"

"Wade introduced some of them and I've talked with others. I speak a little Venusian, you know. Why? What does it matter?"

"It doesn't—except that your friend Wade Ballentine seems to employ quite a staff. The diagram shows where several of them live but fails to give one important detail—where do they work?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Don't they observe office hours?"

She reflected. "I guess they do. At least, most of them aren't in evidence during the day periods. And I recall hearing a girl make a date to meet Kor Oomla—one of the secretaries—after work."

"Do they leave this building?"

"I hardly think so."

"Looks as if we'd have to force one of them to serve as guide. Three stenographers—" Brent mused—"all in one apartment. One we might handle, but the others would give an alarm. I suppose the male secretaries have families?"

"All except the one I spoke of—Kor Oomla. He's a gay bachelor."

"We'll tackle him," Brent decided. "How would you say in Venusian, 'Take me to the place where you work'?"

"*Lor hoobia ma di ablo*," responded Vesta. "But he'll refuse."

"It may require persuasion." Brent's fingers caressed the miniature blaster tucked in the belt of his trunks.

"But why run the risk? What good is it going to do you to get into that office?"

"Sorry," Brent told her, his voice taking on an edge of harshness. "I'll have to play this my own way." He felt for the door, opened it cautiously and peered into the corridor. "The fellow's quarters are in the other wing of the building, according to your sketch—across the hall from a utility closet. Right?"

"Yes; but do be careful. Perhaps if I went along—"

"That would only mess things up," he checked her brusquely. "If we're caught, you haven't seen us—keep that in mind. Ready, Pete?"

THEY ENCOUNTERED no one in the dimly illuminated hallway. Reaching the apartment of the Venusian secretary, Brent knocked lightly.

There was no response, but he imagined he heard movement within. As he was about to knock again, Pete's hoarse whisper restrained him.

"Someone's comin'!"

Without hesitation, Brent drew his companion into the concealment of the utility closet across the hall. Holding the door slightly ajar, he could watch the corridor. The footsteps heard by Pete apparently sounded from the floor below. A door closed, and all was quiet, save for their own suppressed breathing.

Brent was about to step from concealment when the door of the apartment across the hall opened. A head cautiously emerged, then a slender figure, swathed in an exceedingly gauzy negligee. Followed a whispered exchange of words, then a kiss-smothered giggle, and the door closed.

The Venusian girl was barefooted and as she turned away the lack of gravity sandals caused her to lose her balance. She was clutching at the door of the utility closet when Brent swept her into his arms, one hand closing over her mouth.

The girl struggled, attempting to scream. But after the first startled impulse, she altered her tactics. The slender body melted against her captor. Her free hand crept up around his neck. Venusian girls were apt to be like that. Coming from a tryst with one lover, she no doubt thought some rival suitor desired her, and she was not averse.

"All right, sister," Brent commented. "*Lor hoobla ma di ablo.*"

She jerked her head free from his palm. "*Má di ablo?*" she repeated, in a puzzled tone. "*Par no hoobla ma daroo?*"

Although the alternative she proposed was no doubt attractive, Brent insisted, "*Lor hoobla ma di ablo.*"

The girl shrugged. This powerful

stranger evidently knew what he wanted. She emitted a giggle of acquiescence and, taking him by the hand, led him through the corridor which connected the two wings of the building. Pausing midway before a blank portion of the wall, she became aware of Pete. Her eyes turned questioningly to Brent and she asked something in rippling Venusian accents.

"He's coming along, too," Brent assured her, "if that's what you want to know. *Lor hoobla ma di ablo.*"

The girl looked bewildered, but when he repeated the phrase she ran her fingers over the decorative pattern with which the wall was inlaid until they touched some spring, whereat the panel silently rolled back, revealing an elevator compartment. The trio crowded inside, the panel closed, and the elevator silently descended.

Its floor evidently provided additional magnetism for those equipped with gravity sandals, because Pete and Brent experienced no difficulty in maintaining equilibrium; but when Brent relaxed his hold, the girl floated to the ceiling, her arms and legs waving futilely.

She giggled and snuggled against Brent when he dragged her down and while he tried to rearrange the flimsy negligee over her body. She was a voluptuously pretty little specimen, despite the green tint of her skin and hair.

"She thinks you wanna make woo with her," commented Pete, with a note of disapproval.

THE GIRL looked at him distrustfully. For the first time, an expression of real alarm rose to her eyes. Even in the half-light, it must have occurred to her that this burly man, speaking an unfamiliar tongue, was not a member of her race. She glanced in startled unbelief at Brent, then ut-

tered a scream. Her hands fluttered toward the control panel of the descending car, but Brent captured them. She was emitting a flood of Venusian invective when the car came to an abrupt stop.

The door panel automatically opened and Brent carried the girl, now struggling furiously, into what appeared to be a well-equipped business office.

A quick glance revealed a long counter, behind which were desks, chairs, cabinets, accounting machines, stenorecorders, and other paraphernalia.

"Get something to tie her with," Brent ordered. After a clumsy search, Pete located a spool of tough recording tape, with which they trussed the girl to a chair. When she could no longer struggle, she screamed until they stopped her with an improvised gag.

"I'll bet she was cussing us out plenty," Pete observed. "Kinda cute-looking at that, ain't she?"

Brent ignored the comment. He opened a door but found the next room in darkness. A moment later he located a master switch which lighted the entire suite.

He made a quick tour, finding the spread of offices surprisingly extensive. Judging by the length of time it took to make the descent, he estimated that this underground layout must be situated at a considerable depth below the building. It had the appearance of serving as headquarters for a large-scale business. There were rooms equipped with intricate accounting machines, recording devices, and files, and other rooms containing complex machines the use of which he could only surmise. He recognized, however, a planetary receiving and sending apparatus powerful enough to communicate with stations as far away as Earth

and, in all probability, Venus and Mars.

Pete trailed at his heels, surveying the array of equipment with uncomprehending eyes. "What would a gink like Ballentine do with all this stuff?" he demanded. "Don't hardly seem like he'd need it, living alone like he does."

"You're telling me," was Brent's terse response. He made his way back to a room devoted solely to records and began a rapid but systematic sampling of its contents.

Most of the records were on microfilm, the majority in Venusian typscript. But a late-model automatic translator was part of the room's equipment. It was only necessary to adjust the dial in order to project an idiomatic English version. There were also files containing original papers and documents, to which he devoted a share of his attention.

Pete strolled restively from room to room, occasionally stepping into the receiving office to assure himself that the girl had not succeeded in writhing free of her bonds. Presently he stopped beside the desk where Brent worked. "How much longer you gonna be?"

"Hard to tell," Brent answered absently. "Here—take the blaster. If any one comes down the shaft, you may have to hurn 'em."

"That not be necessary, Brent Agari!"

Pete whirled sharply as the crackling voice apparently came from some point behind him. No one was there, but the voice gave a derisive laugh.

BRENT, after his first startled moment, sat composedly, eyes scanning the document before him.

"Put down blaster, Pete Monson," the disembodied voice warned. "You not see us, but we could have ray you to cinder from moment you enter this room."

Warily, Pete backed toward a corner, holding the blaster at readiness. Unexpectedly, he gave a yell and flung the weapon from him.

"It got hot!" he said apologetically, wringing his hand. The tiny blaster was singeing a hole through the rich carpet where it had fallen.

"This demonstrate," the voice went on, "how futile to offer resistance. Curiosity cause us to refrain from disabling you at once. We have desire to learn what portion of our records so interest you to risk life for examine."

"Well," responded Brent, "now you know." He glanced speculatively toward the outer office. "I suppose it was an alarm attached to the lighting system that tipped you off. I thought of that, but it was a risk I had to take."

Again the voice laughed mockingly. It reached them, presumably through the normal channel of some office intercommunication system, and Brent had no doubt that they were in full view of an observer through an ordinary visiscope pickup.

"Is this Wade Ballentine speaking?" he asked, although he felt sure it wasn't. The voice was markedly Venusian, even though the speaker had acquired a fair mastery of sibilants.

"Kor Ballentine be duly inform," was the response. "Unnecessary for wake him relative to so trivial matter. Now, if you conclude inspection of records which do not concern you, please be so kind as make return to elevator."

"If I refuse?"

"You not refuse!" At the words, a searing flash of heat burned into Brent's side. He staggered to his feet. The heat ray had flicked him only for an instant, but it left him with the sensation of having leaned against white-hot metal.

"Come on, Pete," he said thickly.

They were crossing the outer office where the girl was tied when Brent paused. "Shall I release our prisoner?" he asked. A vague notion of using her as a shield prompted the suggestion.

The unseen owner of the voice laughed. "Very thoughtful! But unnecessary. We fully able take care of young lady."

The elevator cage rose as soon as they stepped inside. Its ascent was brief. At its abrupt stop, another wall panel opened into a dark chamber of some sort.

"Kindly to enter," the voice instructed. As if to enforce the demand, the tiny enclosure suddenly became too hot for comfort.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Pete, diving through the opening. "What they trying to do—cook us?"

Brent followed. There was nothing else to do. The panel closed, leaving them in total darkness.

THE DARK chamber was evidently to serve as their living quarters for an indefinite period.

It was penetrated by no ray of light. Only by feeling their way around could they arrive at an estimate of its shape and size. It was apparently hollowed out of solid rock, the floor smooth, the low roof and sides rough and unfinished. At one end was a niche containing toilet facilities and a drinking fountain. There were no other furnishings. They slept on the hard floor. The place was undoubtedly serving its intended purpose—that of a prison dungeon.

At lengthy intervals, the darkness was alleviated for a brief period when the wall panel opened part way to reveal the elevator cage. It was empty save for a meager food ration in paper-like containers. After pausing long enough to allow removal of the food, the elevator withdrew, the panel clos-

ing so tightly that they could scarcely feel its juncture with the wall. If they tried to enter the cage or interfere with the panel, the heat ray forced them back.

Brent estimated the intervals between rationing periods at about eight hours—a complete rotation of the planetoid. If his estimate was correct, the time stretched to an interminable three days, four days, five...

They grated on each others' nerves, as men invariably do when confined together under conditions of galling inactivity. Pete ran through his limited emotional gamut, at times walking up and down the confined space roaring epithets at Ballentine, the Venusians and his companion, at others breaking down and moaning like a bewildered animal. "What in time did you wanna mess around with their records for?" he demanded. "You coulda knowed we'd be caught."

"Shut up!" was likely to be Brent's growled response. But in another mood he said contritely. "I'm sorry I got you into this, Pete. It was something I had to do, no matter what the risk."

Frequently Pete bewailed the loss of his hook, left behind in the shelter. "If I had them pictures of old *Terror of the Spaceways*, it'd be something to keep me company," he moaned.

"You wouldn't be able to see the pictures in the dark." Brent reminded him.

"Mebbe not. But I could hold the book and make out like I was seein' 'em," Pete argued.

"Well, make out that you're holding the book," advised Brent. For a long time Pete was silent, perhaps carrying out the suggestion.

A frequent question from Pete was, "How long you figger they're goin' to keep us here?"

"I don't know a thing more than you do."

"Could be the rest of our lives."

"Could be," acknowledged Brent.

ONCE AN unaccustomed note of sarcasm crept into Pete's voice. "Who's the big blabber-mouth that claimed they was a way out of every jam if you had brains an' guts? 'If you want the breaks,' he mocked, "'you gotta make 'em.' All right, make some. Get us outa here."

"Good advice," responded Brent with maddening nonchalance.

On the sixth day—Brent's reckoning—Pete commenced beating his head against the wall. The sodden thumps roused Brent from a torpid sleep.

"What's up?" he demanded. "Here, cut it out!" He dragged his companion away from the wall. "What're you trying to do—kill yourself?"

"I can't stand it!" sobbed Pete. "I can't stand it!" He subsided into a crumpled heap.

When the elevator brought its next food ration, it paused for a longer period than usual. After a moment, the communication instrument concealed somewhere in its interior ordered.

"Move closer to light."

While Brent hesitated, Pete mechanically thrust his bulk into the elevator entrance.

"What happen to head?" the Venusian accents inquired.

Brent, blinking from the unaccustomed light, saw the reason for the question. Pete's face was covered with blood—his temple a mass of welts.

"Pete tried to knock out his brains," he answered grimly. "We're going stir-crazy. That's what you want, isn't it?"

The panel closed, leaving the two men to munch their food in darkness.

Half an hour later, the car unexpectedly returned.

"Kindly to enter," the voice commanded.

It was an order which both were

ready enough to obey. Anything was better than remaining in that interminable darkness.

They found themselves a moment later on one of the floor levels of the mansion. As the panel opened, half a dozen armed Venusians faced them in a semicircle. The voice, still speaking through the address system, instructed peremptorily:

"You come 'long, no make trouble. No do, very much regret."

Brent surveyed the odds. "We'll no make trouble," he conceded.

Closely guarded, they were marched to the end of the corridor, thence down a short passageway and into an open doorway. The door closed upon them, leaving the Venusians outside. A moment later, a small panel in the door opened and they were subjected to scrutiny from a pair of intense Venusian eyes.

"I am Kor Omba. Speak high-grade Earth-Engalish. You no make trouble, can remain here. More better than dark, eh?" The panel closed.

It was indeed better than the dark, even though still a prison. Aside from the barred windows, it might have been any comfortable guest apartment, with a living room, two small bedrooms, and bath.

"Oh, boy! am I gonna pound my ear on that bed!" Pete gloated. "If I had my book to look at I wouldn't ask nothing better for the rest o' my life."

"You'd go stir-crazy here, after a while," Brent told him. He surveyed himself in a mirror. "First thing on my program is to get rid of this green stain."

OMUTA STAIN, fortunately, is amenable to soap and water. When he and Pete were once more presentably white-skinned, except for a renewed growth of beard, they luxu-

riated in the soft beds until aroused by a bell which heralded the arrival of a dumb waiter.

The food allotment was no better than usual, but it was delightful to be able to eat while lolling in comfortable chairs. When he had consumed the last crumb, Pete stretched and observed:

"Wonder what made 'em take us outa that hole."

"I've been wondering, too," Brent acknowledged. He studied Pete's bruised forehead. "That's it!" he declared with conviction. "Tbere was a way out and—just as I said—it took brains to find it. If you hadn't tried to beat yours out, we wouldn't be here."

Pete stared at him blankly.

"Looks as if they were scared we might do ourselves harm," Brent amplified.

"What difference would it make to them?"

"That, I'm trying to figure out," was Brent's reply.

Life in the new quarters became tiresomely monotonous. Their meals arrived more frequently than in the dungeon—at approximately four-hour periods, a little after sunrise and before sunset. On the third day, the door panel was opened. Unblinking eyes surveyed them for a moment, then the familiar voice inquired:

"How you making out, all right, eh?"

"So far," conceded Brent. "How long are we to be kept here?"

"No have authority for answer such question."

"Well, how about sending your boss to talk with us. Tell Ballentine I want to see him."

"Goo-bye."

"Wait a minute! Bring us something to shave with, will you? I'd like to get rid of this brush."

The reply was emphatic. "No shave. Lettum beard grow."

The panel closed. "Now, why," demanded Pete in an aggrieved tone, "does he have to act like that? Ain't no way we could make trouble with a shaver, is they?"

"Hardly seems like it," conceded Brent, "unless he had in mind those cutting blades of yours. I could do with one of them right now."

From their prison-apartment, they could peer through substantially barred windows at the row of outbuildings facing the mansion. The landing field was out of their range, although the edge of the larger hangar could be discerned. The bars were set securely in the wall and Brent, for all his vaunted claims that there was a way out of every predicament, had not been able to devise a plan of escape.

Two more days, by earth computation, passed—days which seemed almost as interminable as those spent in the dungeon. Then the monotony was broken by a visit from a Venusian who seemed, from his manner and the deference of those accompanying him, to be a man of importance. In addition to the usual loin-cloth, he wore a richly embroidered purple jacket and elaborately embossed boots.

HE ENTERED, accompanied by guards with blasters threateningly raised, and dropped into an easy chair facing the two prisoners. But he spoke no English—or else refused to acknowledge it—and ignored the questions Brent flung at him. He sat for several minutes intently staring at the two, occasionally referring to something concealed in a folder. After this silent appraisal, he abruptly rose and stalked from the room, followed by his retinue.

"Now what?" grumbled Pete. "All he done was set and look at us. It don't make sense."

"Nothing makes sense," replied Brent, "until you know the answer." But he could only speculate as to the answer to this one.

Two days later, the Important Venusian repeated his performance. This time his scrutiny was less prolonged. He closed his folder with a snap, nodded to the guards, and withdrew. Shortly thereafter, the English-speaking Kor Omha opened the door sufficiently to toss in a hundle. Then, from the safety of the observation panel, he ordered:

"You puttem on."

The hundle resolved itself into the one-piece prison garments the two had discarded when they converted themselves into pseudo-Venusians.

"Put these on?" repeated Brent. "Why?"

"Do like tell," Omha insisted. "No do, come guard. He make puttem on, no fooling."

"Okay," conceded Brent. After all, the shortest cut toward finding out the purpose of an order was to obey it.

The Venusian watched while the two donned their shapeless prison garb, then closed the panel. A few minutes later, half a dozen guards streamed into the room. Before the Earthmen surmised their purpose, they found their hands manacled securely behind their backs.

"What is this?" queried Brent. "Execution day?"

No one answered. Under the prodding of the guards, the two Earthmen marched from the room, thence to a broad stairway which led to the first floor. They were ushered into an ante-room. A slender figure rose from a couch at their entrance. It was Vesta Clement, attired in the space suit and helmet she had worn at the time of her arrival on the sphere.

"Are they sending you back, too?" she demanded eagerly. "I was worried."

I thought you must have—I didn't know what had happened." She caught sight of their manacles and stifled a gasp.

"Sending us back?" Brent repeated. "Why? Are they sending you?"

"Yes. Isn't it wonderful?"

"I don't believe it," he told her bluntly.

"But it's true. Wade has decided I can't be happy here, so—he's sending me home in one of his space yachts." At Brent's incredulous expression, she pointed. "See," triumphantly, "here's my baggage."

Brent glanced in the direction she indicated. Stacked against the wall were the lockers and bags she had brought with her in the tender. Pete uttered a yelp of delight. "My book!" he exulted, taking a step toward it. The guards forced him back.

"What happened to you?" Vesta asked eagerly. "I heard nothing—and didn't dare ask. I couldn't imagine—"

"We got caught," Brent informed her absently. He was trying to figure out the angles to this situation. Surely Ballentine wouldn't take a chance on sending Vesta back to Earth, where she could cause all kinds of trouble:

DISCUSSION of the subject was checked when Ballentine himself, accompanied by the Important Venusian, strode into the room.

This was the first time either Pete or Brent had seen the master of the planetoid at close range since the day of their arrival. He was a big man, towering an inch or so over Pete, but his muscles looked flabby—his features slack. He studied the prisoners from beneath glowering eyebrows.

"You fellows have been giving me a mess of trouble," he growled.

There seemed no point in answering this.

"You—" he pointed an accusing fin-

ger at Brent—"you're no convict. You came poking around here because you want to get me in a jam. Who the hell do you represent?"

The smile on Brent's lips grew strained, but he offered no reply. The Important Venusian uttered a few words in his own tongue. Ballentine nodded, then shouted:

"I'll tell you who you are. You're an agent of the Terrestrial government, trying to find out what doesn't concern you."

Brent eyed him stonily. "Such as," he suggested, "the fact that you and your pals usurped this planetoid, murdered its owner, converted it into headquarters for the biggest racket in interplanetary history?"

Ballentine glanced at Vesta—almost as if disconcerted by the accusation made in her presence. He hastily withdrew his eyes. The girl's face had gone white.

"Whatever you've found out—or surmised—" he growled—"it won't do you any good or us any harm. You'll never make a report."

"Then why bother to question me?" goaded Brent.

"I'll tell you why!" Ballentine's voice became strident with pent-up fury. "You can make it easier on yourself—on Miss Clement and this fellow with you—if you come through and tell us who you're working for. Is it Interplanetary Space Lines or is the Terrestrial government directly involved?"

Brent took a step toward him, so menacingly that the Important Venusian at Ballentine's side recoiled. "What do you mean—make things easier for Miss Clement and Pete? What have they got to do with it?"

"You ought to know. You dragged them in—up to their necks."

There was an interruption, while the Venusian demanded to know what

was being said and Ballentine impatiently replied. Brent's features hardened. He said slowly:

"I'll tell you this much: I'm in this entirely alone. Neither Pete nor Vesta Clement has the slightest notion what it's all about. The people I'm working with took advantage of—" his eyes flicked toward the girl, who was staring at him wide-eyed—"of Miss Clement's request for special passage to this asteroid. They hooked her on the prison ship and arranged its flight so that she could be landed here. Warden-Captain Van Tassel wasn't in the scheme—although I had authority to include him if necessary—but we planted some factors on his ship so that I could escape at the right time. I went aboard as a prisoner—even with a faked criminal record. Pete happened to be my cell-mate. I brought him along to make things look good."

"You're telling us what we already knew—or figured out," Ballentine responded impatiently.

"Then why make the preposterous charge that these two are mixed up in it?"

"Because they can't help themselves. You—" Ballentine's eyes blazed with rancor—"dragged them in."

BRENT returned the angry gaze with answering fury. Yet in part, the anger was for himself. It was true. Whatever his fate, the other two would have to share it—because they knew! It was knowledge not of their seeking, but now that it had been forced upon them Ballentine could not let them escape.

Pete had been a bewildered listener. "What's the guy talkin' about?" he appealed.

No one answered him. Brent spoke slowly, his voice tense and restrained:

"I've only this to say," he informed Ballentine: "The worst danger you

have to fear is that some harm will befall Miss Clement. The people I work with—the government agencies cooperating with us—know that she paid this visit to her uncle's planetoid. If she isn't returned safely, within a reasonable period, all hell will break loose."

The Venusian again interposed. Ballentine sulkily interpreted, his smoldering eyes on Brent.

"Tell him this," Brent added: "When this happens, you won't have one investigator to deal with—you'll have an army of them. All they need is an excuse to bring them down on you in force."

Ballentine responded with a short, ugly laugh. "You tell us so many things we already know."

The Important Venusian, with a terse comment, turned as if to indicate that the interview was over. Ballentine followed him to the door. There he abruptly swung around, his features contorted with frenzy. "Damn you!" he shouted at Brent. "Damn you!"

When the door closed, Brent stood staring at it for a long moment with an expression of astonishment. Then, ignoring the guards who remained, he glanced at his companions. Pete's countenance expressed thorough bewilderment.

"I'm sorry, Pete," Brent said regretfully. "I wish I hadn't dragged you into this."

"You mean it's the straight dope—what you was tellin' this highbinder? You ain't no con?"

"I knew you were a fraud!" Vesta interjected. "I've felt almost from the first that you were here with a purpose."

"Evidently I'm not too good an actor," Brent acknowledged ruefully. "I'm not saying this to alibi myself, but the plan—of using you without your knowledge or consent—was

worked out before they put me on the case. We didn't realize, of course, that your uncle's place had been usurped. For all we knew, he was in on it."

"Would it be too much to ask—in on what?" she demanded coolly.

"Briefly, on a huge interplanetary protection racket, backed by space piracy. Pete knows a little about this. Some twenty years ago, the old Arcurus raiding fleet slipped underground—or showed its teeth only in small depredations. Significantly, its vanishing from the scene coincided with the rise of firms which, for a price—an exorbitant price—would guarantee the safe arrival of space cargo or passengers. These insuring firms have delivered the goods, but their ability to do so is a little too pat. The Terrestrial government knows there is collusion—a conspiracy—but hasn't been able to trace its ramifications. There must be a mastermind—a coordinating center—and this satellite has been under suspicion for a long time. That's why—"

"I gather," the girl interrupted, "from what Wade said, that you found what you were looking for."

"It's here," he acknowledged. "All of it—in black and white. By confiscating the records, the government will have an air-tight case."

"But if my small knowledge is such a menace to their safety, why is Wade letting me go?"

"Is he?"

"I've told you. He said he realized I'd never be happy here. He's sending a yacht to Earth for supplies and will take me along."

"That's all he told you?"

"Substantially, yes. He was glum and morose—as if it irked him to burden my wishes—but his instructions were explicit. He told me to pack everything I'd brought here—be even brought back the blankets I'd left

with you—and to wear this space suit in which I arrived."

BRENT shook his head. "I don't get it. It stands to reason he couldn't let you go. Even if he had such an intention, it would be impossible after the conversation you've just overheard."

"But you said yourself that he couldn't afford to harm me. He must have decided that sending me home is lesser of two evils."

"He's on the horns of a dilemma," Brent acknowledged. "No wonder it's driving him into nervous spasms. But still I don't see—" He paused abruptly, struck by an overwhelming idea. "I do see! It's his one way out. What a dumbhead I've been! It all adds up to—"

He did not finish. The door opened and a Venusian gestured peremptorily. The half dozen guards who had been keeping an eye on the trio leaped into action, hustling them toward the door.

Brent glanced at his fellow prisoners. Any attempt to break away now would prove abortive. "Keep your eyes and ears open," he urged brusquely. "Our chance may come. We can't let them do this!"

On the broad veranda, half a dozen floaters were lined up. Brent and Pete were herded into separate planes, the girl into a third. Her baggage was brought out and distributed between two others. Pete made a futile gesture toward reclaiming his book as it was tossed in with the rest of the baggage.

In the short interval of their flight, Brent had only a few moments for reflection. He knew now, with startling clarity, what to expect. Their fate was sealed—stark, dread, inescapable.

The floaters discharged them inside the large hangar, near the gleaming silvery hull of a streamlined space yacht which rested on the cradle which

would convey it outside for a takeoff. The entrance port was open, with ramp extended. Beyond it loomed another—a larger, heavier craft—but the activity of departure centered around the smaller vessel.

"You see!" Vesta exclaimed, with mingled triumph and relief. "That's the ship he promised me."

Brent scarcely heard her. His eyes were fixed on another hull—dwarfed by the two larger vessels—the cigar-shaped body of the prison ship's tender, in which they had arrived on the planet. It had been fully repaired, landing gear and all. An expert job—for his searching gaze revealed no evidence of where body dents had been smoothed out or new parts welded onto old.

"They must be taking you back, too," she exulted. "Perhaps they think— Oh, there's Wade. I'll ask him."

Ballentine had appeared from behind the cradle which supported the gleaming space yacht. He was accompanied by the Important Venusian and several others.

Brent restrained her—his voice urgent. "There'll be an instant—when they take off these handcuffs. I can't tell you what to do, but—watch your chance—both of you. We can at least make a try. Grab for a blaster."

The girl looked bewildered. She turned and ran toward Wade Ballentine.

"Tell me the truth!" she flung at him. "You are sending me home, aren't you? You're keeping your promise?"

THE MAN was in an even blacker mood that when he had last confronted them. He looked at the girl without saying anything. His glance strayed to Brent and his features worked in a contortion of inarticulate

rage. Abruptly, he turned on his heel and strode toward the ramp of the space yacht.

Vesta stared after him, then took a few hesitant steps as if to follow. A guard blocked her way.

She walked slowly back to rejoin Brent and Pete.

"You were right," she said in a colorless tone. "They aren't going to take me home. What are they going to do?"

For answer, Brent gestured toward the space tender. Two Venusians were tossing the girl's luggage through the narrow port to some one inside, who maneuvered the pieces into the freight compartment.

"You've never been here," Brent told her bluntly.

Her eyes met his in blank astonishment.

"None of us have been here. That tender didn't come within a thousand miles of TS-482."

Comprehension flooded into her eyes. Pete snickered. "Jumpin' rockets, Brent, you ain't tryin' to tell me I dream' all this."

"It's the same as if you had. If inquiries are made, no space tender ever landed on this planetoid. That's why we're all dressed the same as when we left the prison ship. That's why they kept us waiting until our beards grew out so they checked with pictures they took that first day. That's why they wouldn't let Pete disfigure himself. It's their one way out. They'll stuff us into the tender and tow it a few thousand miles into space, then set us adrift. When Ballentine claims we never landed here, there'll be an intensive search. Our own people will locate the tender with radar beams and find us looking exactly the same as when we cut loose from the prison ship—except that we'll all be dead. And not a thing to cast doubt on the evidence that we

missed the satellite. It's foolproof."

For a moment, stunned minds digested this. When Vesta spoke, her voice was calm. "Not foolproof," she declared. "We'll leave a message. When our bodies are found—"

Brent shook his head. "They must have anticipated that. We're meant to die the instant our craft leaves this atmosphere—perhaps quicker. Somewhere in the hull of the tender there's a hole or a crack—it's not air-tight. The oxygen valve will be jammed. It'll be easy to make everything look natural. Once they get us—"

He had no chance to complete the sentence. The guards bore down upon them, one carrying the miniature blaster Vesta had originally worn in her belt. He extended the pistol toward the girl, then, as she instinctively reached for it, tantalizingly jerked it away. Cbuckling, he tossed the weapon far back in the freight compartment of the tender.

TWO GUARDS seized the girl, while no less than four each attached themselves to Brent and Pete. This was the moment Brent had obscurely visioned—the moment when the Venusians would have to remove their handcuffs before thrusting them into the tender. Now, with his arms gripped by four lusty guards, any one of them a match for his own strength, the futility of struggle smote him remorselessly. Two more guards, blasters in hand, stood warily apart from the group, ready to assist if needed. The Important Venusian, with half a dozen companions, stood watching the procedure.

From the ramp at the entrance of the space yacht, Wade Ballentine moodily overlooked the scene. He was seemingly unarmed, but a guard stood beside him, blaster in hand. In the fleeting instant while his manacles

were being unlocked, Brent saw the guard turn to Ballentine and make some laughing comment.

Then his hands were free, but his arms were held firmly. The two greenales who had attached themselves to Vesta were forcing her into the space tender. As soon as she disappeared through the narrow opening, Pete was hoisted after her. The moment for action was passing. Brent shouted hoarsely:

"Get the blaster! Pete—delay them!"

A vicious slap from one of his captors went unnoticed, but the green hand that closed over his mouth smothered his voice.

Intentionally or not, Pete presented difficulties to the guards who were trying to push him through the entrance. His massive shoulders swelled. The Venusians frantically punched and tugged and, by sheer force of combined effort, accomplished their purpose. Hustling Brent between them, his guards expedited matters by using him as a battering ram to force Pete's reluctant hind quarters inside.

It was now or never. First tensing himself as for an extreme effort, Brent employed an old trick, relaxing so suddenly that his captors were thrown off balance. Two of them momentarily lost their grip. He lashed out violently with both feet. One caught a guard under the chin and sent him spinning.

Now, twisting and thrashing in an all-out surge of energy, Brent felt himself suddenly, unbelievably free. With a reflex impulse quicker than thought, he whirled on the guards and knocked two of them sprawling. Seven or eight more crowded in to subdue him, but their very number gave him a momentary advantage.

Unexpectedly, there were agonized shrieks, and two Venusians fell writhing to the ground. With a flash of

comprehension, Brent realized that Vesta had located the blaster and was using it ruthlessly. A surge of exultation swept over him. At least they could go down fighting.

To his momentary surprise, the guards, instead of retaliating, caught up the weapons dropped by their stricken mates and retreated warily. The Venusian leader was shouting instructions—apparently ordering them to hold their fire.

Sure! They didn't dare blast the Terrestrials. A disfiguring wound would be mute evidence that the space tender must have landed. This was an advantage Brent hadn't counted upon.

BUT IT could be only temporary respite. Already, the guards were adjusting their blasters. They'd sear the Terrestrials with a paralyzing ray—render them unconscious—and that would be the end of resistance.

"Run!" Brent shouted. "The space ship!"

With one arm, he snatched the girl from the entrance port. Pete dived after her, landing headlong, but immediately gained his feet. Shielding the girl with their bodies, the two men plunged toward the ramp of the space vessel. Only Ballentine and the armed guard barred their way.

Brent caught at the blaster clutched in Vesta's hand. As they started up the ramp, he fired point-blank at the Venusian guard. But the tiny weapon had spent its charge. The guard gave a mocking laugh as he leveled his own blaster at the oncoming trio.

Glancing over his shoulder, Brent saw the other guards closing in from behind.

Thrusting the girl into Pete's arms, Brent leaped toward the space-yacht entrance. Better to be blasted down by the leering Venusian than yield to the fate intended for them.

At the moment of his leap, an inexplicable thing happened. Wade Ballentine turned on the Venusian and knocked the blaster from his hand. Before the astonished guard could finish his yell of protest, Wade caught him up unceremoniously and hurled him over the heads of the Terrestrials into the huddle of guards at their rear.

"Inside!" Wade hellowed. "Dive in!"

Brent felt the man's arms impatiently thrusting him headlong through the opening. Similarly propelled, Vesta and Pete hurtled in to join him. The trio were picking themselves up from the floor of the airlock as Ballentine pulled frantically at the lever which closed the port. He forced the air-tight oval into its socket just as the foremost guards reached the top of the ramp.

Ignoring his passengers, Wade plunged into a narrow passageway leading to the vessel's interior. Brent followed at his heels. He reached the control room as Ballentine swung into the pilot's seat.

While the big man was making hasty adjustments on the control panel, Vesta and Pete joined them. Ballentine swept them with a glance over his shoulder. "Climb into the percussion couches," he ordered. "We're blasting off."

Pete yelled a protest. "Hey! We're inside the hangar!"

"We're blasting off!" was the snarled response, as the rockets roared into action.

Aside from a jolting lurch at the instant of takeoff, there was nothing to indicate that they had torn through the roof of the substantially built hangar like a projectile. By the time they could lift their bodies from the percussion couches, the observation viewplate revealed only the star-studded blackness of space.

SWAYING unsteadily in the uncertain gravity of the vessel's interior, Vesta lurched toward the two men who were peering over Ballentine's shoulder at the star vista. With an inadequate lace handkerchief, she dabbed at the blood flowing from her nostrils.

"Well, that—" her voice quavered—"was a narrow squeak. Or am I guilty of understatement?"

Brent glanced at her pale features, then gave her the support of his arm. Abruptly, as Ballentine depressed a lever, the scene in the viewplate changed, "Rear view," Brent informed them. All eyes searched for the tiny world they had so unceremoniously quitted, but its identity was lost in a field of gleaming pinpoints.

Ballentine deftly worked the telescopic focusing mechanism. Brent felt a hand on his shoulder. Pete's hoarse voice sounded in his ear.

"Hey, I'm all mixed up. I thought this guy was agin us. Ain't he the big boss of that racket? Ain't he the mastermind—?"

Brent shook off the hand in annoyance. His eyes were fixed on the viewplate. "Is that it?" he demanded, bending forward to look closer.

"Looks like it," Ballentine answered, without emotion. He fiddled with the adjustment, trying to bring a tiny blurred sliver into clearer focus. "It's the Star Dragon," he announced.

"The ship we saw back in the hangar?"

Ballentine nodded.

"Faster than this craft?"

"Plenty. One of the old raiding fleet. She'll overtake us inside of an hour."

"Armed?"

"With long-range atom blasters. At five hundred miles, we haven't a chance."

Brent studied the instrument panel. "You're heading earthward?"

Ballentine shrugged assent. "We'll

never make it." He glanced at Vesta and then at Pete, whose face still registered complete bewilderment. He seemed to recall the latter's question.

"Mastermind!" he repeated derisively.

"I kind of had you figured this way," Brent told him. "You were as much a prisoner as any of us—that right?"

"In a way. Though I'm not offering excuses. I liked the idea at the start. Big shot—and all that. Till I came to realize what I was. Just a front. Not a big shot," he commented bitterly, "just a big bluff." His eyes again flicked toward Vesta. "I never saw your uncle. What happened before they installed me here to take his place I never learned. Maybe he died—more likely he was murdered. Anyway, the outfit took over without the formality of notifying Earth authorities. If anybody bothered to look us up, I was Wade Ballentine. Nobody much bothered, as long as I turned in routine reports and paid the annual satellite tax."

He switched the viewplate to the forward field, studied the prospect for a moment, then returned it to rear vision.

"Your people had the right hunch," he told Brent. "The raiding fleet headquarters is out in the asteroid belt. But this administrative center is what you need. Too bad you won't live to turn in your report."

Brent offered no comment. "Mind if I investigate the radio turret?"

"I couldn't stop you. But we're a long way short of Earth range."

IGNORING the ladder, Brent leaped to the overhead hatchway and pulled himself into the cubbyhole. A moment later, the others heard the whine of a generator and the snap of signals. Presently Vesta squeezed

through the hatch to sit in the cramped space beside him.

"Any luck?"

"I've no hope of getting through to Earth, if that's what you mean."

His hand continued to work the sending key automatically while he answered her. Impulsively, she placed one of her own hands over his.

"Brent—if we should get through—what are you going to do about Wade?"

"Why ask me? Decisions of that sort rest with the authorities."

"You could use your influence," she insisted. "He helped us. We wouldn't have escaped otherwise. He's doing all he can for us now." She considered a moment. "He opposed their plan—I'm sure. He and the others were arguing—violently. He must have opposed their casting us adrift in space. That's why he was so angry at you—because you forced him into a position where he was helpless to save me. There wasn't a thing he could do—until you created the opportunity. He didn't hesitate then. He—"

Brent turned on her a glance devoid of expression. "You're in love with him, aren't you?"

She recoiled, flushing. "All right, then, don't answer my question. But I think Wade is entitled to a break." After a moment's silence, "Tell me the truth—I can take it. Are we really doomed?"

He avoided her eyes. "Wade knows his space ships. It will probably be a quick death—painless."

Her figure slumped, but she made no comment. At intervals, his fingers, still covered by her hand, tapped out a signal. After a while, she spoke in a scarcely audible voice.

"You asked if I was in love, I am—but not with Wade Ballentine."

Her gaze met his steadfastly. His rugged features were impassive, though

he could not wholly control the expression that leaped into his eyes. But when he spoke, his voice was hesitant, embarrassed.

"Well—that's fine. I'm glad. It makes going out—somehow easier. But there's always a chance that something may happen. Better not commit yourself—till we know for sure."

With a hurt expression, she withdrew her hand from his.

"You may have forgotten," Brent went on in an even tone, "that if you live, you'll find yourself a very wealthy young lady—heiress to a private world and all the rest of your uncle's pelf. You'll be one of the most sought-after—"

"Oh, stop!" she checked him. "I'd sooner be dead. As far as I'm concerned, they can give it all back to the space gremlins. There's no law to make me accept it, is there?"

Brent changed the subject. "As for Wade, he's proved himself a man, for my money. Whatever weight I may have, if we should ever—"

He broke off, as Pete gave a warning shout from below. Very deliberately, he kissed Vesta, then helped her through the hatch.

Pete gestured excitedly toward the percussion couches.

"The guy—" he indicated Ballentine—"says they're almost on our tail. Get set for a hairpin turn."

INSTEAD of joining Vesta and Pete on the shock-absorbing couches, Brent climbed into the co-pilot's seat beside Wade. "I'm no expert with this type of craft," he observed, "but call on me if I can help."

In the viewplate, the Star Dragon was clearly visible—its outlines growing momentarily more defined.

"We may outmaneuver them—once or twice," Wade said grimly. "Here goes."

The star field seemed abruptly to sweep across the viewplate. The straining of the hull—of the vessel's entire fabric—was like the tension on a steel spring at its breaking point. The effect upon its passengers was more agonizing than acceleration, because it was centrifugal. In the instant before he blacked out, Brent realized that Wade was forcing the protesting craft into a complete about-face within the shortest possible radius.

He came to his senses with a blinding headache, blood cascading from his nose. Ballentine, hands still gripping the steering control, was shaking his head to clear it. Brent opened the "swab" compartment and, with the absorbant squares it yielded, cleaned up first Ballentine's face, then his own.

It took them a minute or two to locate the Star Dragon in the viewplate. It was far at their rear and speeding in the opposite direction, though nearing the apex of its slow turn.

"Dodged 'em that time," Brent commented.

"Yeah," Wade responded. "That time." He did not need to amplify. They were good for one, possibly two, more such turns. Human endurance would prove unequal to more. Playing this game, the Star Dragon could afford to take things easy.

Swinging down from the co-pilot's seat, Brent found Pete groggily struggling to his feet. Vesta made an effort to rise, but her features were ashen beneath their spattering of blood.

"Better lie there," he advised compassionately. "Take it easy till next time."

"Next time!" she repeated, with a gasping intake of breath.

He did not reply. Returning to the radio turret, he applied himself to the sending key until a warning call told

him they were about to make another turn.

He was longer in coming out of the blackout this time, and within his head was a sensation as if innumerable blood vessels had burst. Ballentine's body had slumped over the edge of his seat, straining against the safety belt. Without bothering to clean the blood from his own or Ballentine's face, Brent took over the controls and sought their pursuer in the viewplate.

By the time he had located the Star Dragon, again making its lazy turn in the far distance, Ballentine had begun to regain consciousness. He sat quietly for a few minutes, his eyes on the star field. Presently he said:

"I'm afraid that's the last."

"Looks that way," agreed Brent. He glanced toward their companions. Neither Vesta nor Pete had moved from the couches.

"Could you find the planetoid again?" he asked presently.

"I think so," Ballentine favored him with a curious glance. "No point in landing there. We've nothing to stand them off with."

"I wasn't thinking of trying to land. But if we circle close enough, the Star Dragon may hesitate to use its atom blasters. A flick of those rays and you know what would happen to the seal-gas layer."

BALLENTINE grunted assent. "They wouldn't take a chance on losing their atmosphere. But at close range they could bombard us with armor-piercing rockets."

"I know."

Brent climbed down. As he did so, Pete sat up, wiping his bloody face with a sleeve. Vesta was clutching her head between both hands. She seemed only vaguely conscious as Brent wiped her face with a dampened absorbent

square, then put his arm under her head in order to give her a drink of water.

She gulped it eagerly, eyes regaining their awareness. "Thanks. Must we—go through that again?"

He shook his head negatively, whereat she tried to sit up. "If it's on my account," she said resolutely, "don't hesitate. If the rest of you can take it, I'm game."

"Sure you are. But we'll try some other delaying tactics, for a change."

The color was beginning to return to her face. He gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder and again headed for the radio turret.

Ballentine was proving himself a skillful navigator. When next Brent descended to the control room, the roughly spherical body of the planetoid was clearly distinguishable from its star background.

"We can circle at about fifty miles," Ballentine commented. "Within that radius, the Star Dragon won't dare use atom blasters. But she can swing into an orbit nearly as close as ours and take her time about picking us off."

By the time Ballentine maneuvered the vessel into its path of encirclement, Pete and Vesta had recovered sufficiently to join in watching the viewplate. The Star Dragon looked alarmingly close. Ballentine estimated its distance as three hundred miles.

"She'd have used the atom blaster by now, if she dared. Kor Enlo won't risk that. She'll have to come closer to employ rockets."

"Kor Enlo," repeated Brent. "Is he the one who acted so all-fired important?"

"You're probably referring to Haj Ormangoree. He's the high-ranking factor of this branch. Kor Enlo is the ship commander. He was to have

piloted this vessel when it towed you into space."

"The entire outfit—the whole backing of the space-insurance racket—is Venusian. Am I right?" queried Brent.

"All of it. Except for a few miserable tools like myself. I don't know how deeply you managed to pry into the records, but you probably got some idea of the extent to which the Venusian government itself is involved."

"I was beginning to sense a connection."

"It'll create an interplanetary scandal—if it's ever uncovered," Ballentine went on. "You spoke of a mastermind. In reality, it's a closely knit syndicate including Haj Ormangoree and some high-ranking Venusian diplomats. They've managed to cover up their connections by an ingenious system of legal camouflage, but it's all there in the archives. I wish— Oh, oh! There it comes!"

BRENT, TOO, caught the flash from the Star Dragon as it expelled the rocket. They were conscious of a sickening lurch as Ballentine twisted the controls.

Possibly the slight change of direction saved them. The rocket missed.

"They'll expect to waste a few, getting our range," Ballentine commented.

"What's them specks out there?" demanded Pete, pointing to the edge of the viewplate.

Ballentine brought the objects into clearer focus. There were five of them, undoubtedly space vessels flying in close formation.

"Reinforcements," he commented briefly. "I had an idea there'd be a call for assistance. Usually there are units of the fleet within signaling distance."

"Let's take it as a compliment," Vesta suggested. "They had to call out a fleet to wipe out the four of us."

Brent felt a surge of admiration for the girl. She was plenty game.

The Star Dragon closed in upon their orbit in leisurely fashion. Its range was much closer when the next flash of rocket expulsion came; followed by three more in rapid succession. Some one uttered a warning cry. The control room was suddenly a shambles—its four occupants tossed about like kernels of corn in a popper.

In the ensuing silence, Brent heaved his shoulders free from the embrace of two ladder rungs. Above him, Pete hung head downward from the hatch of the radio turret, a ludicrous expression of surprise on his features. Ballentine had been flung from the pilot's seat and was struggling painfully to a standing posture. One arm hung limp.

Vesta Clement dazedly tried to disengage herself from Brent's arms. She had been lying against his chest and appeared to have suffered the fewest bruises of any of them. Whether he had instinctively caught her to him or whether she merely happened to land that way, Brent could not have told.

The big surprise was that they were all alive and breathing.

Wade Ballentine half lurched, half floated toward the controls. His one usable hand played over the levers. He turned with an expression of futility.

"We're helpless—inert," he announced. "All power dead."

Brent helped Vesta to regain her feet. The absence of gravity, now that their power was gone, made every move a travesty. They floated toward the ceiling before he could prevent. Only the affinity of their sandals for metallic contact gave them a precarious surface foothold.

"The rocket must have taken off our tail section," Ballentine observed, talking as if to himself. "There's an

air seal between the two sections—otherwise we'd have been goners. Well, it was a good try while it lasted."

Pete propelled himself out of the hatch. "You ain't hurt?" he demanded solicitously of Vesta.

"I landed on a very nice cushion," she laughed shakily. Brent, suddenly aware that his arms were still about her, self-consciously withdrew them. He joined Wade, who was staring at the viewplate.

The Star Dragon was close—so close that its intent evidently was to hoard them. The Venusians might still carry out their original intention toward the Terrestrials.

THERE WAS one possible way to prevent that. If they put up such a fight against capture that the greenies were forced to blast them, they would wind up just as dead as if hurled into space. But mutilated bodies wouldn't serve as exhibits verifying the Venusian claim of their failure to land.

Brent voiced this thought. "We're going to be boarded—it won't be long. That means death, anyway we look at it. Except—" he glanced at Wade—"perhaps not for you—"

"Don't count me out," the latter responded quickly. "I'd choose it—rather than go back."

"All right. Let's make them do it the hard way. Force them—" his voice choked at the vision of Vesta's beautiful body and expressive features seared and mutilated, but he continued inexorably—"to damage us so that they can never claim we missed our landing."

"They can't no more'n kill us," growled Pete. "And some of them greenies is gonna know they was in a fight before I go down."

A sharp exclamation from Ballentine drew their attention to the view-

plate. At that instant, they felt a jarring vibration throughout the vessel. Ballentine looked suddenly deflated.

"Nothing," he said briefly. "That's the boarding contact. For an instant I thought I saw the Star Dragon streaking it away, but I was mistaken."

They could do no more than wait. The boarding party would first have to force the portal. Once inside, they could reach the interior through the regular lock.

"We've one advantage," Wade commented. "They don't know whether any of us survived. Better let them get inside the control room before we attack. Here—" he fumbled in a drawer below the control panel and came up with two heavy blasters—"I nearly forgot these."

Keeping one for himself, he handed the other to Brent. Pete looked disappointed, but was mollified with a wrench and short length of pipe from the tool compartment.

Wordlessly, the four waited, eyes focused on the tube-like entrance through which the attackers would have to emerge in order to reach them.

They felt rather than heard the impact of feet in the passageway. Unable to restrain himself, Pete uttered a belch of rage and plunged in to meet the enemy. His roar of combat was choked to a gurgling sigh. Ablaze with fury, Brent leaped to the entrance through which Pete had disappeared. In the instant before he could use his blaster, it was almost knocked from his hand by a blow.

"Drop it!" yelled Ballentine, as Brent whirled upon him in surprise. The big man's one good arm was upraised to strike again. In the split second before the blow landed, Brent had time to think, "The dirty rat!" Then all was blotted out.

THE ACHE in his head was unbearable. Awareness of its throbbing

intensity was present long before conscious thought intruded on Brent's tortured mind. Even then, it was not exactly thought—but a series of impressions. A whirling fantasy of distorted bodies and limbs in a cramped control room. A girl's low, thrilling voice repeating, "I'm in love, but not with—" A gurgling throat rattle as the life was wrenched from Pete's body. Ballentine's swarthy features just before that treacherous arm descended. In his fury at that betrayal, Brent tried to struggle erect. Something pressed him back—something soft and soothing. Its gentle pressure seemed to draw the ache out of his throbbing temple. Brent opened his eyes.

Vesta smiled down at him. "Tough guy!" she taunted. "They said you would come out of it, but I almost doubted them."

Fumblingly, Brent worked one hand upward and closed it over hers, holding it there against his aching brow.

"It was Wade," he told her. "The rat turned traitor."

She moved her hand down until the palm pressed against his mouth. "You're not to get excited," she said, with the primness of a nurse. Then, after a moment. "But you're wrong about Wade. It was the only way he could stop you when he realized what the boarding party was."

"I don't get it."

"They were members of the Terrestrial space patrol. You'd have blasted at least one of them if Wade hadn't caught sight of their uniforms. He didn't mean to hit you so hard."

"I see." Brent glanced for the first time at his surroundings. "This looks like an officer's stateroom in a patrol craft."

"It is."

"How'd they get here?"

"You're a funny one to ask that. It was your signal that brought them."

Captain Fanchett is burning with impatience to discuss it with you. Shall I tell him you're able to talk?"

"Not yet. When you take your hand away, my head starts to hurt." He managed a grin, but the grin faded as he asked. "Poor old Pete. I suppose he—"

"Getting the wind knocked out of him probably saved the patrol a lot of broken heads. He and Wade landed with the raiding party. To bring you up to date, they've rounded up the entire headquarters staff of TS-482 and taken possession of the records. Some Venusians tried to blow up the archives, but—thanks to Wade's foreknowledge of their plan—our boys forestalled them. And it was the Star Dragon that Wade saw speeding away—with two patrol vessels in pursuit."

BRENT STARTED to speak, but she checked him. "Another thing—Wade says there's a will—somewhere in those underground vaults—leaving all of Uncle's property except the planetoid to charities and research foundations."

He looked at her a moment in silence. "But the planetoid—is yours?"

"It was. I've signed a release deed-ing to the Terrestrial government all

my right, title, and interest in TS-482. Captain Fanchett says I'm crazy, but the document is legal. He's fairly drooling with anticipation that the government will award the sphere to the space patrol as a base."

For the first time Brent relaxed. His eyes, fixed on Vesta's flushed countenance, held a dreamy expression. "Do you know what?" he remarked. "When I recommend Pete for parole, I'm going to suggest that they find him a nice job as custodian for a girl's seminary."

"I can't imagine a more suitable occupation for the old pirate," responded Vesta with conviction. "And—as for—"

A peremptory knock on the door checked her. She rose abruptly. "It must be the Captain." But as Brent still clung to her hand, she hesitated. "Do you think it's safe, this time?"

His eyes were puzzled. "Safe for what?"

"Safe to commit myself?"

He had no chance to answer, because the door opened and she was gone, and the uniformed figure replacing her was undoubtedly Captain Fanchett of the Terrestrial Space Patrol, who had various important matters to discuss with Lieutenant Commander Brent Agar of the TSP Intelligence Service.

THE END

FLEXIBLE IRON

A SYNONYM for brittleness is the familiar cast iron. This oldest of engineering materials in the modern industrial age has always been used where great compressive strength is desired; but where shock is encountered, or where flexing takes place, cast iron is out. It simply can't stand the gaff the way steel or alloys of that nature do. Nevertheless, cast iron is a familiar material in machine building.

A year or two ago, however, there appeared a new form of cast iron with amazing properties. It is called ductile iron, and while it is not quite so good as steel, it is far different from ordinary cast iron with which we are all so familiar. This ductile iron is conventional pig iron treated with alloying elements like magnesium and is given certain heat treatments. The result is that it behaves very much like certain forms of steel; it is so good in some cases it can be used for springs! A year's experimenting with the metal has proved its worth and it is being used now to replace the more costly steel wherever possible.

—Carter T. Wainwright



The greatest mystery of all time—the Moon Caves—are herein described by our unknown historian. What long-lost race dwelt within Luna? How did Byron fit in?

CHAPTER XIV

BLACKOUT

UPON HIS thirtieth birthday, Byron left Venusia, together with his followers, numbering several hundred, and went to Luna. Whether or not this was one facet of a far-reaching plan, we will never know. We do know that at the time

Byron became deeply interested in ancient lore, variously entitled black magic, voodoo, legerdemain, and devil worship. Possibly he felt the atmosphere of the Moon Caves, those eternal mysteries for which no logical explanation has ever been given. (1)

(1) Rafe Bullock (*Moon Caves—Eternal Enigma*): "These caves extend over an area of some five hundred square miles. There are seven known entrances (the mystic number?) and consist of eleven general segregations.

"Their age is generally computed at ten to twelve thousand years. That they were inhabited by intelligent entities is beyond question. Rooms, passages, even subterranean cities, were hewn from solid rock by mechanical means. The machinery used in these processes was necessarily of a nature indicating an advanced civilization. Yet the work itself is of a rather primitive nature.

An answer to this paradox may be that the caves were used as slave quarters by a superior race living on Luna's surface. The surface, however, bears not the slightest indication of ever having been used by living beings. Is it possible that a civilization

Certainly, the atmosphere of the Lunar Caves was perfect for what Byron seemed to have had in mind. He obtained a Dominion Grant to some ten miles of the Lunar subterranean area and fitted it out in luxurious style. (2)

At the time of Byron's Lunar transit, the Universe was in a peculiar state of unrest; an unrest which could easily be termed satiation. History had proven that a man without a goal is an empty man; a world turned by invention, progress and fulfillment into an Eden is in reality an empty world. That Man was made to walk but not to arrive; to dream, but never to see his dream crystallized into reality; to look longingly at a cloud, but never to stand upon that cloud as a goal ar-

rived at. The cloud must be merely a stopping-off point—a place to rest for a time and find another cloud to long for.

It was believed, by early historians, that Man would never crystallize his dreams, and in reality this was true. But they overlooked the possibility of another basic arriving at fruition. This, the dulling of Man's ambition through luxury and complete satisfaction, had certainly become reality.

Greatness springs, in truth, from the lean and hungry belly. No motivation exists which contains the irresistible driving force of hunger. Hunger for food; hunger for a little more of what life has to offer; hunger for a house as large as that of one's neighbor. (3)

could have been completely obliterated by space-borne destruction in some form? Hardly. There is ample proof that Luna never had an atmosphere. A telling argument, which is met by the believers in the astro-physicist, Nocardo, with the promise that Luna is an invader into our system—a former inhabitant of an "ether sea" area of the galaxy where atmosphere exists upon the strength of its own ability to exist, and is not dependent upon any planet or solid body as an anchor.

"Granted, this is true, we can accept the Nocardian theory that all traces of a civilization upon the surface of Luna were burned away, during the satellite's passage through void. Several of these "ether seas" have been located. Therefore, Nocardo's theory is not without foundation of a sort.

"The unanswerable question relative to the Lunar Caves is that not a splinter of human bone has ever been found on the globe. No remnant of clothing, not the smallest scrap of a cooking utensil, not one clue as to what could have happened to the inhabitants of that strange underground world. Was it an immortal race of beings? Did none of them ever die? The absurdity of these explanations comes, at every turn, head on into the seeming impossibility of the Lunar Cave situation as we find it."

(2) Dominion Grant No. X-5943-W, made in favor of Byron and His Company of Poets, is now the property of Calais University and may be viewed in their Paris Museum.

Byron's Lunar Sanctuary has been recreated recently in its original location. Completely destroyed by deep bombing during the first of the Preliminary Wars, the accurate reproduction posed many problems. The various replicas around the Universe are, of course, entirely fictitious and were built to appeal to the sensation seeker. They are little more than varied attempts to create various presentations of torture chambers.

(3) John Evans, *The Hollow Men* (published by Lion Books in Old-Style, 1962). A piece of light literature of somewhat superficial human relationship and adventure, popular in the ancient times. One passage, however, interprets a human basic as accurately, that it is worthy of quotation. Toward the end of the volume, Evans' leading character states:

"It had happened gradually, but now it hit me suddenly—how I'd changed. Maybe I'd been a boy—maybe that was how it had been—and now I'd become a man. But whatever I'd been, there'd been nothing inside me somehow. Just drifting from one place to another without my feet or my heart tied to anything. A hollow man. And I guess the whole world is really nothing much but a mirror—a different mirror for everybody—where everybody sees their own reflection and nothing much else. So all I'd seen was a hollow world, because I didn't give much of a damn one way or another.

"A hollow man walking around in an empty world. An empty man in a hollow world. A hollow world full of hollow people.

"There was a rhythm to it and I kept rolling it around in my mind. It kind of fascinated me.

"But it didn't scare me because all that was over now. My world was no longer hollow. It had something in it—even if that something was only an electric chair."

Thus was the state of the Universe while Byron held forth in his Lunar caves, apparently engrossed in the old forms of orthodox evil: Samuels, Byron's biographer, paints a picture of a man far removed from the current events; a man entirely disinterested in the universe of his time; a student immersing himself in all the interesting phases of the dead past. (4)

There is ample proof that Samuels, during his entire productive life, was a man bewitched by the personality of Byron. We have every reason to believe he was a sane, sensible, decent man. Thus, it makes one shudder to read his calm, seemingly dispassionate, descriptions of cruelties, idiosyncrasies—nay, even insanities—which sprang from Byron's brain. But even Samuels could not bring himself to write the details of Loma Zeiss' death upon Byron's altar.

We have reason, also, to doubt Samuels' assertion that Byron was a "disinterested" student of ancient arts. His mind certainly—at the time stated—tended toward these things. But why did he select for his sacrifice the figure most certainly capable of causing a Universal disruption?

One is forced to believe that even then Byron knew, exactly what he was doing and how he was going to do it. His entire career was a series of discords, disruptions, deliberately engendered hatreds. Where there was no cause of discord, Byron created a cause. And each disruption of the norm—greater than the last—hastened the current tenor toward a condition Byron desired. There is little doubt that, even at this time, Byron had visions of his future greatness.

The Poets, after the unholy frenzy of the ceremony at which the wife of

(4) Lincoln Samuels (*The Life of Byron*, Temple Photopress, various publication dates): "It was a memorable period—the last of the Lunar era—and gave no inkling of the stature of things to come. We were an inquisitive, happy, congenial group of investigators, sparked by the genius of one man. Byron was the beginning, the middle, and the end of it all. He was the whiplash and the motivation, yet there was no personal effort in his driving. The very presence of the man was enough; that and the knowledge of the others as to Byron's desires of the moment...."

"The entire central cave of the west wing was done in black. The Moonson light fixtures were removed and the only illumination came from long, thick sticks of wax through which was run inflammable cloth. Ordinary fire was applied to the cloth and, in the process of burning, the fire on the cloth also burned the wax, very slowly, providing illumination of a sort. Hundreds of these wax sticks—called candles—were necessary to keep one from splitting one's skull against the osteoporphs on the walls."

"Here, Byron investigated the ramifications of ancient Black Magic. This art, long lost in antiquity, was revived by our group through the process of painstaking research and labor. Members were dispatched as far afield as the Neptunian Colonies in search of records originally transported from Terra by the First Families to move to the far outposts."

"Byron studied the books, scrolls and tapes with a zeal that characterized his every action, a single-mindedness he seemed to be able to put on and take off like a jacket. Many of the black-magic rituals were performed in the Dark Cave with an earnestness and seriousness which again bespoke the zeal of the entire company to conform with Byron's slightest wish."

"As we got deeper into the mysteries of this black art, a human sacrifice became necessary if we were to proceed to the ultimate in the thing. Using a member of the company did not suit Byron's purpose. He felt the individual should be of more importance. He selected, therefore, the wife of Conrad Zeiss, the Chairman of the Federated Council."

"Seven members of the group were selected from volunteers to bring the lady to our altar. Byron formulated the plan through which this would be accomplished and, because of the fact that he himself did this, not one member harbored the least doubt as to the success of the plan."

"Two members of the party died violently, but the lady was delivered with all trails covered."

Zeiss was sacrificed, lapsed into a reaction of fear. They envisioned the consequences as being disastrous to their persons. And well they might.

Byron, however, approached the consequences with dispassionate analysis. He was evidently keenly interested in just how much indignation would be aroused among the people of the Universe.

The storm was sudden and violent. Whether this surprised Byron is not known, but it certainly did not frighten him. He issued a baldly arrogant statement to the effect that Lorna Zeiss had, of her own free will, joined the cult, and that her death had been voluntary. Going, evidently, upon the theory that a swift attack is the best defense, he lashed out at his critics, calling them "narrow-minded bigots with no vision and no concept of life beyond their own narrow spheres".

Just what his argument was intended to prove is doubtful. It achieved an end, however—the end which Byron probably had in mind. It was the first move in beclouding a clear-cut issue, until the death of Lorna Zeiss became incidental in a Universal argument. (5)

Byron subscribed to the belief that there is nothing new under any sun in any Universe. Thus, his career was based upon a broad knowledge of what had gone before him. He absorbed a vast knowledge of the men, and the achievements of the men, who had ac-

complished what he intended to accomplish.

He delved exhaustively into the lives of Hannibal the Carthaginian, and told his followers exactly why Hannibal's tragic march against Rome, in ancient times, failed. He had the greatest contempt for Napoleon, calling him the most inept military man of all time.

In contrast, his admiration of the American Robert E. Lee was unbounded. He diagrammed every battle of Lee's career and held forth on the man's genius.

However, Byron seemed to regard the study of military men as a pleasure, where the study of politicians was a prime necessity. He was of the opinion that politicians shaped the course of events, and that generals merely solved problems set up by the masters of state. He had a great admiration for the Englishman Disraeli, considering him the greatest strategist of all time. He also held forth upon the career of Franklin D. Roosevelt and rated Monson Horlick as the greatest of the twenty-second century.

Thus, Byron was well equipped to come to grips with a situation he deliberately created, and to profit therefrom. He made himself unavailable to the Interplanetary Security Body when they sent representatives to take him to Minneapolis for preliminary questioning.

It appears that he allowed several days to elapse in order to judge the

(5) Leek Danamon (*The Hitlerian Principle*, Wildcat Photo Press, 2764). The theory of mob stupidity was first put to practical uses in the time of the local Terran Wars. At that time, an opportunistic nationalist of continental Europe filled a breach between the humiliation of a defeated country (Germany) and the assault upon victor countries which (in the German mind) wiped out the humiliation.

Hitler based his entire career upon a contempt for the masses. He subscribed to the theory that the statement, in itself, is unimportant—the presentation and repetition of the statement is the paramount point in respect to the mass of people. Any statement—no matter how absurd, how preposterous, how revolting—gains the status of "truth" by the dignity of official presentation and—repetition—repetition—repetition.

Hitler's brief success was based upon this premise. He proved it beyond all doubt. His fall was due to other factors. There is reason to believe he stood secure upon his foundation of falsehoods, toppling it himself through military inadequacy.

tenacity of the Body in this matter. When they remained adamant, he dispatched several of the Poets to Terra for the purpose of blowing up several blocks of the City of Denver.

This was done secretly, of course, and achieved the desired effect. Universal surprise and indignation quite eclipsed the Zeiss affair. Not in two hundred years had an act of violence of such proportions been perpetrated outside the limits of Venusia.

Also, whether Byron had had foreknowledge of it or not, another factor aided him in the Zeiss matter. It turned out that Conrad Zeiss was a heartless opportunist. The Humanist Laws prevented him from divorcing his wife and we must decide, from the evidence, that he was quite happy at her death.

His indignation, of course, was not one whit diminished by his happiness, but when the Denver affair entered prime public interest, Conrad Zeiss did not press the earlier matter.

So, amazingly enough, the Zeiss matter was dropped, thus revealing that the law-enforcing bodies—which had not functioned actively for decades—were not able to operate vigorously when faced with the necessity of doing so. We are led to believe that this is what Byron set out originally to discover. And we must grant that his methods of so doing were, to say the least, novel and bizarre.

A miscarriage of justice occurred in the Denver affair of the Denver explosions. Three innocent men were given hearings, condemned and executed. This in itself caused a major sensation, since banishment to Venusia had been, for over one hundred years, the major punishment meted out for wrong-doing.

Byron, ever the opportunist, seized upon the legal blunder as another chance for agitation. He caused to be started—through others of his slavish group assigned to the job—a vigorous criticism of the officials responsible for the execution of the innocent men.

As the deliberately instigated furor increased, Byron bided his time. Then, insane as it seemed, he took the blame for the explosion himself. But not insane. Because again he came away unscathed and served his purpose.

So entangled had the public become in the innocence or guilt of the executed man, that the guilt of Byron became somewhat of a side issue.

Byron's ability as a master strategist was now becoming apparent. He had, in a brief time, made himself a notorious figure. The universe wondered about him, but he chose not to publicize himself to any great extent. Instead he allowed all publicity to be directed toward the Poets as a group. Recruits flocked to Luna, seeking admission to the famous group. Byron was ready for them. In less than six months. The Poets increased from a few hundred to a potent force of many thousand.

And Byron now became a deliberate rabble-rouser. He harangued his augmented "army," turning them into followers as loyal as had been his small original circle. Now, with more than fifty thousand fanatical followers Byron was ready for his first important move. He proposed to conquer Luna.

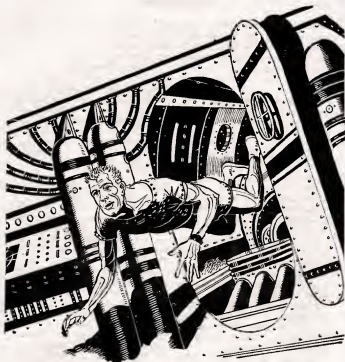
EDITOR'S NOTE: *In the next installment, our unborn historian describes the greatest mass slaughter of all time.*

STACKED DECK

By Lester Del Ray



Their job is to restore zero equilibrium. But they were a little off balance themselves.



The Russians, in their quest for new planets, kept breaking the rules until Thompson found they had but one left—"We Win—You're Dead!"

THE BRIGHT boys with their pep-talks about space and the lack of gravity should try it once! Sure, life's possible without up or down, and you can even eat, provided they feed you on gruel from a rubber bottle with a straw; there's no cooking where gravity won't hold the food down. You can live—if you stay in your bunk and don't do any sudden

moving around to upset your ear-canal.

But nobody mentioned the hiccups and the itch!

As regular as clock-work, after every meal, our stomachs went crazy. With nothing to hold us down or restrain our muscles, it was like having Bikini go off inside us. The first time I got the hiccups, I found myself

tumbling beave-over-bic out of the bunk; if I hadn't had another timed just right to drive me back, I might have busted my neck against the door. We found we had to strap down after every meal, which partly solved that problem.

The itch was another matter. Why no-gravity does that, I don't know; maybe it's because everything just touches, without any real pressure. Anyhow, I'd like to see some of the experts make that go away by relaxing; it almost got so bad we couldn't bet our bonuses away on poker.

Then, of course, there was the Russian ship. Nobody had thought of that, or what to do, when they were explaining all about the glories of our being the first planned Moon expedition.

We'd been swearing about that during the last meal on the rocket ship before landing. Now Major Thompson, just getting over the hiccups, tossed his straps back. He scratched all over, waited to see if his stomach would jerk again, and then jumped lightly down through the bunkroom and out into the control-room. He was good—he managed to scratch his back against the door as he went past.

He would. He's built like a fishing pole—all slim and strong and taut under that calm, dark head of his. A good joe—he had to be to get his rank before his majority, six weeks before. Maybe he still looked like a kid, but the rest of us weren't exactly old.

I waited a couple minutes more, wishing I wasn't so short and neutral-looking, but more like him. Then I wouldn't have to bank everything on a sweepstake ticket to be called a good catch. Oh, hell. I jumped after him, but I missed the door by a good three inches, and barely caught the back of a seat to pull myself down in front of the radar set.

Thompson nodded toward the screen

that showed the Russian ship. "Still there, Sparks. They—ulp! Damn it, Hank, do you have to hit my neck every time you jump in here?"

The big, blond engineer grinned sheepishly, and tried to bide himself behind the banks of controls. Hank Jerrold could figure out any kind of course in his head, but he wasn't much good at self-propelled navigation in the *Jenny Lou*. His awkwardness had almost cost him his chance at the lottery they'd used to select us out of the volunteers.

HIS FACE was envious as he watched Pete Ashford sail in, to make a perfect landing at the navigator's seat. Pete may look like a half-pint left out in the rain until his hair got rusty and his backbone washed out, but he was doggone near as smooth as Thompson.

Then we were all looking at the screen. The Russian ship was not only still there behind, but closer. It was a nice-looking job, too, and going about the business of turning over on its gyroscopes as if it had done it a hundred times, from what we could see.

"Buzz 'em, Sparks," Thompson told me. "There's no use pretending secrecy now—they must have spotted us hours ago."

I nodded, and began shoving buttons. A little wheel started spinning in front of me, counterbalancing the turning of the radar antenna above. Then the radar made a pip on the screen, and I shoved in contact for oral communication.

"*Heraus mit!*" I'd picked up a little German, and figured they might know it better than English. Nobody'd figured we'd need Russian in space. "*Mach' schnell fort! Wir waren zuerst hierher. Jetzt landen wir an Tycho, um den ganzen Mond für Amerika in Besitz nehmen.*"

There was an amused short from the little speaker. "*Alle Jubeljahre. Zurück zu deinem Kindermädchen! Vielmehr nehmen wir Amerika in Besitz! Tycho ist schon unser Treppenabsatz. Auf wiedersehen, Faulenzer!*"

"They don't intend moving over," I said. "They figure on landing at Tycho themselves—and they're calling us slowpokes."

Thompson grinned a bit wryly. "Yeah, so I gather. Nice tactful conversationalist you are, Sparks. 'Scram. We're first. We're landing to take all the moon for America.' Where'd you read your Dale Carnegie? No wonder he told you to go back to your nursemaid."

Damn that Thompson, always knowing things I didn't expect. Maybe I'd been a little careless, but what was I supposed to do—and with my whole body itching so much I could just hold contact down?

Then Thompson grinned, and forgot it. He's like that.

"Want I should call back and *bitte Verzeihung*?" I asked, trying to scratch three places at the same time.

He shook his head, watching the image on the screen. "Wouldn't do any good. They're under orders, anyhow, and they *have* got a faster ship, damn it. Pete, figure a landing curve to Aristarchus."

"Already got it. Made it up when we first spotted them."

"Good man. I suppose they had the jump on us in knowing we'd be coming—thanks to Gridley."

"That nut!" I'd already heard too much of Gridley. He'd been picked as volunteer to get in the first smaller ship, with no chance to come back. He showed he was crazy in trying it. Then, instead of bolting in and hoping he could last out until our ship got there, he'd somehow come back to Earth with a story that came right

straight out-of-a hashoesh dream.

"Don't forget he got back," Pete put in quietly. "And he didn't have the fuel when he took off for a return. Maybe he wasn't crazy."

"It's a cinch the Russians don't think so," Thompson agreed.

Gridley had habbled about a hunch of creatures on the Moon, and some fantastic treasure in Tycho and Aristarchus craters. He couldn't give details—something about partial amnesia. He claimed *they* had refueled him and sent him back to spread the word. Who or what *they* were he couldn't say.

HE'D SEEMED normal enough about most things, and nobody could find any insanity in his past—except for his being a little slap-happy over the ponies; he'd even taken ten pounds of old racing magazines along, instead of microfilm novels. But plenty of people who'd rather drop a hundred on the nags than give ten cents to cancer research got by without being called nuts.

Anyhow, he'd started a commotion when he landed near Chicago just before his rockets blew up. He'd spilled the whole story to the papers before the Army could get to him to clamp down on it. Now he was locked up under observation, but the damage was done; the Russians were all set to hit Tycho and do their own checking on his story.

I turned my screen to the Moon. The Russian ship was just ahead of us, at the edge of the screen, and I could see their blasts shooting down toward the surface. It didn't look too comfortable down there. Then our own gyros began turning us over, and the scene started tipping.

I switched to the side screens, where the Russians still showed. Beside me,

Pete followed their course. "They'll make a nice set-down. Hope we do—because here goes. Ready, Thompson?"

Thompson nodded, and the tubes hellowed behind us, while I went backward, with the screens sliding over my chest. The seats were set to flatten out, and their padding was good, but it was rough going. Even flat, and with training, six gravities pressure counts! It did stop the itching, though.

Four minutes later, we were coasting over the surface of the Moon nice and easy. Those new rockets really had it. We stored pure hydrogen fluoride in our tanks, and our pile broke it down to monatomic hydrogen and fluorine. When they got together in the tubes again, they were *hot*! We'd gotten to the Moon without even an auxiliary step attachment, and we still had enough to get back.

The Russians were in Tycho, out of sight now. I tried the radar, and got a weak burp from it. Well, if Thompson wanted them mollycoddled, why not? "*Wie geht's mit Ihnen?*" I asked.

"*Ganz gut, danke.*" The voice came through faint and rough, but plenty happy—as it should be, being still alive. "*Keine Verletzungen. 'S ist recht so schwer!*"

That was a relief. Maybe if they were down without injuries we could do as well. Maybe I sounded a bit pleasanter when I answered. "*Gott sei dank! Glück an!*"

I had just enough time to hear a quick "good luck" from him before I cut on the Luna screen again. I hoped his good wishes counted. Pete was a while, but this was his first landing—and Thompson's, too. The surface below was coming busting up too fast to suit me.

The seats slipped back again as the tubes let out a wash of blue fire. I waited, too scared to feel the pressure.

And waited. And waited.

Suddenly, it was quiet, and Thompson was lifting his seat. "Never felt it, Pete," he said, simply. It sank in slowly. We were down! "You might call your friend, Sparks."

"Can't. This stuff works in straight lines up here." I was busy trying GHQ on Earth. The static was rotten, and there was only a whisper from the set, but I handed Thompson the mike, and he began reporting. I heard something from Earth about how we should have forced our way to Tycho—bright boys, some of the officers there; they kept thinking that a rocket was a tank with at least a .75 on its nose, instead of a hunk of magnesium-beryllium just strong enough to hold its air inside, without even a .22 pistol on board. Thompson only grinned, and finished his report.

"Okay," he told us. "Now, damn it, let's *cat*! Then we rest up from no-grav before taking chances out there. We can use some sleep without straps to hold us down."

MAYBE we should have gone stumbling out for glory, but we'd come the hard way, there were no movie cameras clicking, and I could have kissed Thompson. Even this two-bit world with only one-sixth weight for us felt like heaven. We didn't even reach for the cards after supper, though Pete did try out the dice a couple of times to see whether they'd roll here. They did, but we were too tired to care much. I remember hearing Pete and Hank snoring, and seeing Thompson pattering around, but I was asleep before I could ask any questions.

It felt like plenty of hours later when I came awake with Thompson shaking me. I heard Pete and Hank up and looked over to see them stumbling into the clumsy pressure suits

we had. Then it finally struck me that Thompson was wearing one—and that it was covered with fine, light dust. He'd been outside!

His face made more impression on me, though. He looked like a man who'd just been informed that he was pregnant—and couldn't afford the operation. I got out of the hunk in a hurry, with pictures of mad Russians invading us in my mind. I reached for my suit and opened my mouth to ask questions.

But Thompson cut them off. "You'll see, soon enough. Gridley was either sane, or I'm crazy. I want to find whether you see it, too. Come on."

He snapped down his helmet without saying another word. We were pulling ours down. With them on, we could communicate after a fashion by touching helmets, but nobody had dug up the little radios everyone had talked about—there'd been no room for such luxuries in a space-suit, what with all the windshield-wipers, sunshields, and assorted gizmos.

We followed him, weaving a little in the light gravity, out onto the softest, mushiest kind of top-soil I ever saw. It was more like ashes than anything I could think of. We didn't go bounding around, like some of those fantasies had it, but ploughing through it and working up a sweat. Thompson moved well enough, and Pete did almost as smooth a job, but Hank kept half-tripping and wobbling. I was too busy watching my feet to study the surroundings—until I finally almost stumbled into a door.

It was a door, all right, not three miles from the ship; a nice, shiny aluminum door, set into a building of some white stone, with a pretty brass doorknob on it. Thompson's footprints showed he'd been there before.

While the rest of us did a double-

take, he reached out and turned the knob. The door slipped sideways, opening into a small air-lock. We stumbled in, while I could almost feel moon-monsters jumping all over me. Gridley had talked about them—but he hadn't said *they* were using Yale locks!

When we finally got our helmets off, following Thompson's example, the air was fine, with just a touch of a pine smell to it!

"You see all this?" Thompson asked.

Hank half nodded, Pete swore, and I swallowed my esophagus again. We saw it, all right—a nice little air-lock, equipped with standard fluorescent lights bearing a good old American trademark.

"Saw the place with the little telescope," was all Thompson would tell us, though. He opened the inner door, and began going down a flight of steps. I was trying not to think, which wasn't hard, but something kept going on in my head. "You guys want a drink?"

I WAS GOING to tell him how unfunny he was, when we came to the end of the steps and he turned into a pleasant room with red-leather chairs and a cigarette-vending machine against one wall, a walnut and chrome contraption against another. He punched a lever on the machine and a pack of cigarettes popped out. We didn't want to ask questions then—we grabbed. Smoking was strictly forbidden on the *Jenny Lou*.

Thompson was grinning with an odd sort of amusement as we lit up. He opened the walnut-chrome gadget to show as pretty a bunch of bottles as you could want. There were other dinguses and a refrigerator, but he grabbed the nearest bottle of whiskey and turned back to us. I could see it

labelled in English, though half the drinks carried Russian markings. Anyhow, it was good whiskey.

Hank finished first, and put the glass down. His apologetic voice was weaker than ever. "You know, suh, that's the *realist* whiskey I ever dreamed I was drinking."

Thompson grunted and put the bottle back. "Living quarters for about a hundred men are back there, with a stocked commissary behind them. To the right here, there's something worth seeing."

He seemed to know the place. He started down a hall, then motioned to me as he opened a door onto a room. I didn't need any explanation. It held the sweetest bunch of ultra-high-frequency electronic gadgetry I've seen. Overhead, a big television screen was showing a standard color broadcast.

That got me. You can't pipe a sixty-megacycle signal all the quarter million miles to the Moon. By the time it gets there, even the electron motion in your first tube will come through stronger. Even if you got the signal, though, it wouldn't work—you'd be getting every signal of every station on that channel. But there it was, clean and clear, without any snow, and with the sound as pure as a bell when I shoved the volume up.

Thompson pointed to the console. It was a well-known projection model, unchanged except where someone had lettered Russian symbols under the English markings. There was a big box of some kind beside it, though, that probably did the real work. I looked at the other equipment. Some of it had Russian symbols with English painted under them, some of American make with Russian symbols added. But all had both markings.

About a quarter of the stuff had a factory-built look but never came out of any shop on Earth; it's a cinch we

never built things that way.

"I've already contacted Earth," Thompson told me when I moved toward the microphone. "It's easy with this, and no static. But I didn't tell them much. I want to know some answers before I tell them we're not just exploring the surface."

I followed him out and we trekked through other rooms. There was a machine-shop that made Hank's eyes bulge. I saw him caressing a big hunk of a lathe, while he was looking fondly at something he called a set of pantograph hands. Everywhere, lettering was in Russian and English, equipment was a mixture from both countries, with stuff neither could have had, so far as I knew.

For a while, after that, we separated and began just drifting around, comparing notes when we happened to meet. It was Pete who found the fuel supply place. It was pretty automatic, from what we could see. A machine was set to dig back half a mile into the rocks and come up with a bunch of minerals. The stuff ran through some big vats and wound up being piped into the fuel tanks.

HANK DRAINED off a few drops under a closed hood and stuck in a hunk of glass he found. It etched the glass. Pure hydrogen fluoride, the stuff we used to harness the little atom pile in our ship—and set to make unlimited amounts.

With that, we could begin hiking some real payloads up here, since we wouldn't have to carry fuel for the return trip.

It was Hank's day to cook, and somehow he remembered it. He collected us when chow time came, and herded us into a dining room we hadn't seen before. Hank is a lousy cook, but this time it didn't matter. There was real steak, with corn and mashed po-

tatoes with butter—there was even a pie.

"They've got about anything you'd like to name, suhs," he told us. "'Nuf to keep us going the next twenty years, most likely."

Pete asked the question I'd been trying not to think. "Yeah, fine. But who in hell are the guys who built this? How'd they get all this up here without Earth knowing? And—what happened to 'em?"

Nobody had an answer. I'd been getting one, but I didn't want to believe it. I'd be labelled nuttier than Gridley. But I'm no fool about electronic equipment. Some of the stuff I'd seen in the radio shack simply didn't fit our production methods, and wouldn't for at least another century or two.

Sure, I knew the flying saucers never turned out to be real. But something had been here that never got itself born on Earth!

"And what happens when they come a-running back and find us making ourselves so downright homey?" Hank broke into the silence.

Thompson shook his head. "They're not coming back, unless I'm as crazy as I sometimes think. Think it over. Everything in Russian and English, both. The manuals are duplicated—and some of those manuals were never printed in both languages. The commissary has all the delicacies for either nation's taste. This place is fixed up so either group will fit here—but not for aliens. This is a gift horse, boys—and I'd like a little closer look in its mouth. It might be the Trojan kind."

"Maybe some race outside fixed it up to reward us for reaching the Moon—maybe we're getting a helping hand," I suggested.

"Then I'd like to see who's dealing the hand and why the deck is stacked. No, Sparks, there's more than

that. Gridley was fixed so he could remember just enough, and I'll bet he was supposed to blab when he got back, so the papers would get it and Russia would pick it up. Remember, his ship blew up *after* he was safe—so nobody could see any changes they'd made in it."

Thompson considered the pie again, sampled it, and decided on a piece of Roquefort instead. His face was covered with little lines of worry, but he was being cool enough. He smacked his lips and went on.

"If they wanted to help, they could have announced things to us in other ways. Umm, come to think of it, maybe they did do something. Nobody ever figured how the transformer we use to break down the fuel came to be invented by an unknown mechanic who disappeared afterwards. It seems someone invented it for the Russians, too. But why set things up like this, then? Why build up Tycho and Aristarchus, for either nation? You can be damned sure the men in that other ship are drinking vodka and wondering the same things right now! Why both?"

SOMEHOW, that hadn't occurred to me, but it made sense. Gridley had babbled about two crates. They had one and we had the other.

"Anyhow, the builders won't be back for awhile," Thompson finished. "This was built for us, by something miles ahead of us in a lot of technology. Why they gave it to us, I just don't know. . . . Sparks, you'd better call Earth. Tell 'em we're still exploring, everything's the same. I'm not letting this out until we know more about it. But you might quiz them on what the Russians reported—the Army has their codes, and a beam from here won't be very tight."

I went into the radio shack, and Henry Chickering's voice came

through clear as a bell in a few seconds. He was going nuts on Earth about the reception, trying to blame it on freak weather. All Earth was excited at our success, parades were being planned, when were we going to know what Gridley found?

No, nothing from the Russians that meant anything. They were exploring without any developments.

Thompson had come up in time to hear the last, and he smiled tightly as I signed off. "Thank God, the head man there has some sense, too. Hey, what's that?"

I looked where he was pointing, and opened the locker that had a wisp of paper sticking out. But it was only a racing magazine. I threw it on the desk. "Gridley, I guess. But I thought he landed on Tycho."

"God knows where he was moved. The poor devil can't remember."

Then there was a shout from down the hall and we both went toward it. Pete was waving us on. He'd gone further than the rest of us, and now he began trotting up a long tunnel to a flight of steps. Above them, he threw open a door, and was in a room with a movable dome over it, holding a long, transparent slash. It was like an observatory, and there was something that looked like a telescope, only a lot simpler than the big ones I'd seen pictured.

"Not too big—about fifty inches. Out here even that would make an astronomer drool. But this dingus—" He tapped something attached to the telescope, pushed a button, and a screen on the far wall came to life, showing a picture of Earth from about nine miles up. He fiddled with a knob, and the image grew larger, though clouds ruined the details. "This must be the light-amplifier the star-gazers have been dreaming about. With that, you've got better than any hundred

foot telescope on Earth!"

It didn't mean too much to me, though I gathered it was quite something. Thompson nodded and inspected it. He picked up a piece of paper with a star map on it and pointed to a star circled in red. "And this?"

"They want us to watch there, I guess. Notice what's written below it?"

There were henscratches there that the math boys love, but Thompson seemed to make sense of it. "Umm. Yeah. The relativity formula that shows why we can't go faster than light and why we can't get out to the stars, probably. But they've got it crossed out. This—hmm. *Em-sub-vee equals em-sub-oh over the cube root of vee-squared over vee-squared plus see-squared*. Not much mass increase. With that we could reach the stars!"

"The rest are corrections for time and such, just as crazy," Pete said. "But notice that they've got arrows going up to that circled star. I'll bet there's something there the astronomy men can use to figure out how to crack light speed."

"See," I suggested, "they want to be helpful."

THOMPSON grimaced. "Sure—with a hint, when they could just as well have written out the whole formula, without our having to watch the star. Probably take us twenty years, or more. Well, at least we may get some good out of it. Maybe from here we can find whether the universe expands, contracts, or runs on alternating current!"

We went back down the steps, puzzling over it. Hank motioned to a door opposite the way back. "What's that way, Pete?"

Pete shook his head, and turned toward it. We found another tunnel, but a shorter one. It was apparently wired

up to the observatory, because big cables ran down to desks along the walls, each carrying a screen before it. When I found the right button, the picture of Earth we'd seen before flashed on the little screens.

Then we saw the main room—about the size of a couple of Grand Centrals rolled together. There were machine shops all around it, but the things in the central launching racks caught our eyes first.

"Guided missiles!" Thompson really acted shocked this time, and his mouth was as wide as any. "Controlled from those desks. My God, thousands of them. If they're loaded..."

Hank went stumbling forward, then came back shaking his head. "Not yet, suh. They're all open where they'd be having their warheads. But from that half-assembled one, they've got a right cute pile built into them."

It looked something like the pile that powered the *Jenny Lou*, all right. But even I knew you couldn't build a pile that small, and the monatomic reaction couldn't go on in the size gadget they used. Still, theory or not, I was betting those would work. Cute. Apparently it was up to us to supply the atomic explosives if we wanted to use them, but they were ready and willing to blast down to Earth in every other way, along with desks for their control.

"If the Russians have the same..." I started. But I couldn't finish.

Thompson could, though. "They have, no question about it. This stuff is bilingual, too. And that doesn't make sense unless the race that built it didn't know who'd get which station and made both the same. But there's worse here." He picked up a diagram on the front desk. "Recognize this, Hank?"

"Sort of, suh. Deuterium—tritium fusion—uh, nope. Good Lord, suh,

that's the deuterium-tritium without any need for an A-bomb to act as a starter. Super hydrogen bombs—and the moon has plenty of hydrogen!"

"Nice helpful pals, Sparks," Thompson said bitterly. "They just want to help us—help us blow ourselves up! They yank out the two powers that could go to war any day, fix them up with bases, load the bases with bombs, tell both sides how to make better bombs, and smile sweetly! With what's here, the Earth could be wiped out! But why didn't they just do it themselves? Why all this set-up?"

I didn't have anything to say to that. I'm not married, and I've always been an orphan, which is part of the reason they picked me for the lottery to see who went on this trip. But there were three girls down on Earth, and I might want to marry one of them. After I'd won that day at the track, that red-head... Well, I didn't like to think about what all this could mean down there.

I guess we all had the same idea. The place was nice and cozy, but right then we wanted to get back to familiar surroundings and settle down for some thinking in the little *Jenny Lou*. I stopped in the lounge just long enough to get some bottles before I snapped my helmet on and followed the others. This time, I didn't even know what my feet were doing as we ploughed back through the moon dust.

WHEN WE were back in the ship and I could talk, I swung to Thompson. "But we don't *know* the Russians have the missiles, too!"

"You're a good boy, Sparks," he told me. "But you're a stinking optimist, and I don't feel optimistic. Where are those bottles?"

Hank stumbled forward hesitantly. "But, suh, we *don't* know."

Thompson considered it, while he was pulling the cork out and taking a big swallow. He passed the bottle along before replying.

"Go ahead. And smoke, if you want—we can waste a little air, with the station supplies handy... No, Hank, I guess we don't. So we'll find out. We could knock the warhead door off one of those missiles, put in some plexiglass I saw, and use that—guide it from the station, maybe. I won't risk the *Jenny Low*, but it might be worth sending someone over inside a missile to find out what they've got. That satisfy everyone?"

It was the best we could do. Hank picked up the dice and we tried to settle down to craps. Hank's clumsy, but not with the bones, usually. I already owed him a quarter of my bonus. But this time he didn't have what it took, and I wasn't any better. We tried the cards, and that was worse. And finally we settled down with just the liquor, which worked better. But I still didn't sleep too soundly.

We were a pretty seedy looking bunch ten hours later when we started back to the station to rebuild the missile. Something like a shadow flicked over the ground, but we didn't even look up until Thompson began pointing.

Then we knew there was no need to send a missile over. The Russians had had the same idea. One of the things, exactly like ours, but with a hastily installed window, came whizzing over us, slowing down to a clumsy curve. It went over the dome of the observatory, got back toward the entrance building, and finally was over our heads again. We could see a big young man inside. He was scowling, but he lifted a hand to the glass and waved it.

Thompson pointed up toward him

quickly, then down to the ground below, and nodded. The Russian's scowl deepened, but he waved again before he went streaking toward Tycho.

Thompson watched him go with no expression and headed on toward the entrance. Inside the base, he spread his hands. "I guess it couldn't do any harm to signal him we had things like his—now they know we have a big stick, too. And that tears it. We both have the same. How about your guiding angel theory, Sparks?"

I didn't feel so good. I've never believed that intelligence went with sheer cruelty, no matter what I've seen men do. I used to read the fantasy magazines and get mad when I found a vicious race making war on Earth. I went for the stories where alien life was as advanced ethically as it was mechanically. But maybe Thompson was right, and I was just an incurable optimist. All the same, cruelty didn't explain any more than kindness did.

Pete suggested breakfast—it was his day to cook. I wasn't interested. I turned toward the radio shack where I could slump down, suck on a cigarette, and try not to think how much I wanted to puke. I sat there, tearing strips off the racing magazine and rolling them up into little balls, not even bothering to swear.

"Here!" Thompson had come in, and was shoving a cup of black coffee under my nose. "Drink that—it's laced with brandy, and you need it. Any chance of reaching Tycho base on this set-up?"

I GAGGED over the first swallow, but it seemed to hit bottom and make me feel a little better. I was looking the rig over as I swallowed again. "Yeah. At least, they've got a connection here marked for Tycho Crater. Want me to try it?"

"No." He thought it over, settling down slowly and reaching for the switches I'd indicated. "No, I'll call them. I know enough Russian to get by. Maybe it's all crazy. But they've been holding back stuff from Earth, just as we have. Maybe they don't want the planet blown up, either. Maybe they're thinking how little would start things. After all, damned fools—and that includes fanatics—aren't the men for a trip like this. Maybe I can talk to them."

"Ye b. And w'at good will it do?"

He shrugged wearily. "So you're a p-s-inist now, eh? But you're right—it won't do a damned bit of good, probably. We can't keep it secret—there'll be other ships. But at least we can start acting like human beings while we're here until we get back and the politicians find out. Anyhow, let's see what happens."

He shoved in the switch, and began saying something over and over. Two seconds later, there was a sound from the speaker, and words spilled out. It looked as though someone on the other end had been trying to make up his mind about calling us and we'd found him all ready and waiting. But I couldn't make any sense from the words, not knowing the language, and both Thompson and the other were being darned careful not to let their voices say anything the words didn't.

I picked up the racing magazine and started to tear off more strips. Then something caught my eye, and I noticed a page all covered with writing in the margins—some in English, some in Russian, and some in the strangest hen-tracks I've ever seen. There was something alike in the way the writer had done the job in all three, though.

That made it just too chummy—our aliens busy working out stuff on races that had been run months before. I checked up on one race, where

I happened to remember what happened on that date, because I'd bet on it.

The alien hadn't done badly in his handicapping. He must have been a smart boy. He'd managed to get place and show right most of the time, though he was wrong about three winners—including one twenty-to-one short. That was the one I'd bet on, with my last two bucks. It had paid for a date with each of the three girls I knew, and left enough over for a sweepstakes ticket. If I'd won that, maybe I wouldn't have been on this crazy trip.

Thompson was still talking. I started to turn to another page, but I couldn't keep interested in what some alien might dope out from the form sheets about long-gone races. I tossed the magazine aside and kicked it out of my way when it fell to the floor. I started to kick at a piece of paper that fell out. Then I noticed it was all in English, and picked it up. It was in the same writing as that on the margins—like 'somebody had done a good job of learning script, but hadn't had enough practice with his hands to make it quite smooth.

I read it three times, slower each time. Then I put it down, thought it over, and read it again. But it hadn't changed.

I heard Thompson sign off, but I didn't look up. I couldn't take my eyes off the slip, even to find the cigarettes I wanted.

Thompson sounded tired. "We've agreed, Sparks. The Russians are sending two men back in their ship to report, and I'm sending you back with Pete. Hank and I are staying. After that, it's up to the higher brass.... Sparks! What's up with you?"

I LOOKED up at him while I was handing him the slip, but I didn't

see him reading it. I was thinking about men who were willing to bet their last two bucks on a long shot or shirk suppers to buy a lottery ticket. I was thinking of racehorses, good for only one thing, and game-cocks, bull-pits, and a lot of other things. We've always spent more on racetracks and gambling houses than we have on our national health, and I guess we always will spend that way.

But we always thought other races from other worlds would be either cruel or kind to us. We never figured they'd come all the way from the stars to study us and to set us up as a better lottery!

Thompson had put the note down again where I could see it: *"Any life form that bets on horse racing is insane,"* it said. *"Quite as insane as we are. Well, the smart mancey says you'll blow your world up in six years. But if you get to the stars instead, in thirty, and if I'm lucky in the draw, I'll be waiting to split my winnings with you. Hape we win!"*

Thompson fingered it and dropped it again. He stood up slowly, finally putting it in his pocket. "Just in English this time," he said slowly. Then he shrugged. "Well, it doesn't change

anything. We still have to try. You and Pete will take off for Earth in six hours."

I shook my head, reaching for a cigarette. When I looked up again, Thompson was gone. He had the answer to his questions, because some alien had a whim or decided to try a little cheating on the lottery by tipping us off.

I went out of the radio shack and the base, across the emptiness of the Moon's surface, and back to the old *Jenny Lou*. I'd rather have the hiccups and itches of space a hundred times over than stay another minute in the station *they* built for us. I wanted to get back to one of those girls on Earth while there was still time enough to enjoy it.

If I can enjoy anything! Maybe I'm young, but I've lived long enough not to like drawing the death—and from a stacked deck. I don't like being the booby prize in a cosmic lottery. And that's all the whole human race is now, I guess.

Only I wish I knew whether the Russians found a note in their language exactly like the one I found!

THE END



THE "WALKIE-LOOKIE", a portable television camera, has just been built and successfully tested by RCA. The unit is free of encumbering cables and wires to the control center. Its power unit is made up of batteries in a pack which the operator carries on his back. Also housed in the pack are tubes and circuits needed to transmit the picture and the voice. It is estimated that in operation the unit could

WALKING TELEVISION

By A. T. Kedzie

transmit up to a half-mile for one-and-a-half hours.

When covering events more than that distance away, the unit will relay the picture and sound to a mobile unit stationed nearby, which then sends it on to the station by microwave.

It is estimated that the self-contained power supply feature will cut the time required for television stations to set up equipment to cover spot news.

LIFE IN THE SKY

Sam Dewey

AS R-DAY ("R" for rocket) approaches—and it's coming faster than you think—science is more and more concerning itself with the welfare of the occupants of that rocket. Up until now, rocketry has been such an academic subject that the human factors were almost taken for granted. But that is not so any longer. The importance of this matter is emphasized by two events: one, the release of the Department of Space Medicine's bulletin; the other, the shooting into the sky of a rocket full of mice and monkeys. Both acts are closely related and both show the seriousness with which scientists are scanning the physiological factors of space flight.

It is interesting to note that several of the monkeys died in this flight, a "shoot" to an altitude of eighty miles, well into space, but the definite causes of death were not announced, presumably as a matter of security. Apparently the mice, hardy creatures that they are, found space flight congenial. This experiment is highlighted by the fact that, for the first time, living things bigger than bacteria and fairly akin to humans in their physiological structure were used.

The problems confronting the human being in rocket flight are, of course, infinitely more complicated. This was well brought out by the Department of Space Medicine's bulletin, and not with a Pollanna-ish optimism, either. The facts were faced, and some of them are quite grim. Evidently a good deal of research and analysis will have to go into space-flight physiology before humans go into space.

The intense ultraviolet from the Sun is no problem, naturally, since any opaque or semi-opaque substance stops it to the desired degree. But the evil of the piece is cosmic radiation, a blend of high-speed particles and pulses of photons which, so far as is known, are decidedly inimical to flesh and blood. Furthermore there is no practical way of screening cosmic radiation since, in penetrativeness and intensity, it compares not unfavorably with the output of atomic piles and cyclotrons! Actually this statement is misleading. From what is known of measurements here on Earth, apparently the intensity of cosmic radiation increases with altitude—so far as is known. Now it may happen that that statement is not entirely true. In that case, good. If not...

BIG EYE

FOR THE GENERALS

By

Sid Overman

ONE OF the characteristic features of modern warfare is communications. When a history of warfare is traced through time, the outstanding development appears to be, not weapons and armament alone, but rather their use as attached to, and motivated by, communications. From the crude hand signals and banners of antiquity through the flags and semaphores to modern telegraphy and radio, information has been at a higher premium than any other factor. The battle commander wants to know what's happening—now!

Radio is now so stereotyped that it is a form of communication used automatically. No one stops to think of the enormous investment in electronic gear that accompanies even the foot soldier. In the air and at sea, of course, electronics is used on such a grandiose scale that its cost often exceeds the cost of armament. Thus the greater part of a modern bomber or fighter plane lies in its radio and radar and electronic bombing equipment.

And this aspect of warfare is expanding. Television has added the dimension of sight to communication. Theoretically, it is possible for a battle commander to see every phase of action, no matter how remote, as well as to hear about it. Plans are being made accordingly.

Future tanks, aircraft and other vehicles of war—perhaps even foot soldiers—will be equipped with high-frequency television transmitters, compact and efficient, capable of relaying any battle scene to directorial headquarters. The executive phase of battle operations will thus not only be able to plan an operation for a future time, but will also be able to plan while the battle flows before the commanders' eyes and ears.

The technological aspects are relatively simple and just a matter of time and detail. Already the components have been developed—televising a Saturday afternoon football game is not so very different from televising a battle scene.

Orwell's 1984 clearly depicted the conceivable result of this ability of a few to see and hear everything, everywhere. It carries with it a sense of absolute power. Let us hope that, valuable as it is, this rudimentary omniscience won't presuppose a "Big Brother" peering into every citizen's room!



...AND GOAL TO GO

By Alfred Coppel

Leland was headed for the Rose Bowl. But the team standing in the way was held together by strong school spirit — and by nuts and bolts

IT WAS the Quarterly Financial Report that began all the trouble. If it hadn't been for all that bright red ink, I would never have listened to Big Jim and nothing would have happened.

The Android Company is my outfit—"An Android for Every Use"—and on the side, mechanical calculators and electronic dishwashers. Now,

in spite of all the unpleasant publicity the Leland business brought us, I'm mighty proud of The Android Company. It's a good concern, and competent. It might have been better if we had stuck to dishwashers and calculating machines, but that brings us right back to the red ink of the Financial Report. A vicious circle, it is—just as if always is when quanti-

ties of money are involved.

And no matter what the papers say, I am convinced that we did nothing wrong. After all, it was simply the logical end-product of a trend that started before *our* time. The Android Company was simply *deus ex machina*.

It was early March when Big Jim Standish walked into my South San Francisco plant office. Everybody knows Jim. He's the president of the Leland University Alumni Association, secretary-treasurer of the Big "L" Society and the Athletic Fund, and a member of the Leland Board of Athletic Control. On the side he is an attorney and a millionaire in a small way.

Jim and I were classmates at Leland and teammates on the famous Thunder Team that represented the Far Western Conference three years straight in the Rose Bowl. Jim was an All-American fullback on that team. I was the fourth-string quarterback.

It was no surprise, then, when Jim informed me he had come to talk about football.

He sat down across from me with a deceptively placid expression on his large florid face: Everything about Standish is either pink or large, generally both. His suit was wrinkled and his collar wilted. That should have told me something, but I was too wrapped up in my own troubles to remember Jim always looked like that before all hell broke loose.

I expected a tirade about Pop Dee's tactics across the bay at Western State, or at least a few growling remarks about the restrictions the Conference had placed on him—Jim, that is. Abatement, I think they call it. Jim was "under abatement", meaning that Vic Schroeder, the Conference Commissioner, had forbidden him to contact any prospects for the Leland football squad. Jim had a tendency to

become carried away in such matters, to the embarrassment of all concerned.

However, Jim didn't start in on Pop Dee's farm-club system or Schroeder's persecution of innocent alumni. Instead he looked at me blandly and said:

"I've just come from an alumni meeting, Al. You weren't there." He made it sound like an accusation of sodomy. "The situation down at the school is bad," he said darkly. "It is up to all of us as alumni to take an interest, Al."

When Big Jim Standish spoke of the situation down at the school, he did not mean that the buildings were decrepit—which they were, or that the faculty was incompetent—which it was not. He referred to the fact that Leland University—once a great football power in the West—was unable to field what is sometimes called "a representative team".

Leland was a small private institution competing among larger, state-endowed schools. Back in the days of the Thunder Team, when there was only the Platoon System to worry about, Leland had managed to keep up. But after the Director of Athletics had replaced the President in most American Universities, and the growth of the Regimental System and finally the Brigade System in inter-collegiate football, Leland had faded badly. The old school simply could not afford the manpower. Our alma mater had not won a game in five years.

Naturally, as an alumnus, I suffered. Particularly in late November, when came the annual classic against the gargantuan trans-bay rival, Western State. But I had other troubles at the moment, and I told Jim so.

"Jim," I said, "why don't you give it up? Leland isn't going to have a winning team—ever again. Forget it. Or, better yet, fire Sad McWilliams

and give his coach's salary to some good charity."

STANDISH looked shocked. "I'm surprised to hear you talk like that, Al," he said. "It hurts me. Deeply." He leaned forward in his chair and lit a cigar. I swallowed enviously. It was a dollar fifty Havana. "Leland is fielding a winner. *This season.*" He leaned back with a conspiratorial smile. "This season," he said again, "with our help."

I smelled blood and began rearing. "Oh, no you don't, Jim! No touches for the Athletic Fund. I'm swimming in red ink now...."

"We'll take care of that, too," he said.

That stopped me. I couldn't see the connection between my company's deficit and Leland's football team—they both looked like fallen sparrows. But I was willing to learn. Indeed I was. I would have lent an ear to Asmodeus himself just then.

"You," said Standish waving his cigar airily, "are the best cybernetician in the country. Speaking bluntly, you sell robots."

It hit me right between the eyes. I think I squeaked a little. "Great Caesar's ghost, man!"

Jim grinned like a Cheshire Cat. "Exactly. I see we understand one another."

"It's impossible. My God, man, you can't do that!"

"And why not?"

"Well—money for one thing."

"I have money."

"But...but you're under abatement by the Conference."

Jim shrugged his broad shoulders. "I won't say a word to the androids."

I cast about, looking for an out. "This is ridiculous, Jim. It's indecent—"

"I don't see it that way," Jim

replied easily. "There's not a word in the Conference rules about players' having to be human beings. Not a word. I checked very carefully, and I have the permission of the Director of Athletics to approach you. I'm making the school a little gift, that's all. You build them and I'll pay. Eleven robots with control and communication equipment and necessary spare parts—at ten thousand dollars each, Al. Cash on the barrelhead. That's the way I like to do things."

I gaped like a fish out of water. I hadn't sold eleven androids in the last three years. People simply don't want any part of them. And now—

I could scarcely see Jim's face. Suddenly it was swimming in dollar signs, one hundred ten thousand of them.

"No," I whispered weakly. "It... it wouldn't work. What about eligibility? The Conference Commissioner...."

"We'll keep it quiet, of course, but they'll be enrolled as physical majors and attend classes. All perfectly legal. You can do it, Al. No one has to teach you cybernetics. They should all be straight A students—for the fall term, that is."

I lit myself a cigarette with shaking hands. "I...I don't know, Jim..."

Standish's face darkened. "Of course, if you can't or won't handle the job, there is always General Electronics. They're turning out some ditch-digging mechanicals that could be converted. I only thought that you—as a loyal alumnus—" He shrugged and stood up. "Since you can't handle it—"

I was on my feet like a shot. "General Electronics!" I cried. "Ditch-diggers! Jim, how could you think of such a thing? Think of the publicity!" I swallowed hard. Think, I told myself, of that hundred ten thousand dollars. "This will have to be

handled with discretion, Jim—"I was hooked.

"You'll take the contract, then?" Jim asked triumphantly.

I drew myself up to my full height and stuck out my chest. "The Android Company will deliver, Jim," I said stoutly.

"Good!"

I dug into my private stock and pulled the Haig & Haig from a lower drawer of my desk. I poured two stiff ones.

"To Leland," Jim said, his eyes moist.

"To Leland, to the Cardinal," I responded. Jim was humming the Alma Mater.

"And now," I said hungrily, "the contract?"

THE DAWN light was greying the sky over the eastern hills when the Android Company truck pulled up to the gate of the newly erected barbed-wire fence that enclosed Leland Memorial Stadium. A sleepy student manager signalled me through and I guided the truck through the tunnel into the interior of the vast bowl.

Six months had gone by since that epic meeting with Jim Standish in my plant. It was now late August and there were months of work behind me. My androids, I felt sure, would be in every way satisfactory. In spite of myself, I was stirred by the thought that through me, my alma mater would once again regain the place she had once held among the colleges of America.

Of course, the androids had still to be tested under game conditions but, as a cyberneticist, I knew that they were bound to be better than any group of athletes now competing in the Far Western Conference. In fact, they were, I thought, a good deal

more human than most.

As I drove along the running track surrounding the playing field, the team sat in the back of the truck, humming very softly with the restrained electronic life of the robot at rest.

Sad McWilliams and his line coach, Bronco Dorgan, stood with Big Jim Standish at the fifty-yard line waiting for me. Carefully screened students paced the stadium wall with sawed-off shotguns, for Pop Dee over at Western had gotten wind of something big brewing at Leland.

I stopped the truck and clambered down from the high cab. Jim came forward to greet me heartily.

"Good boy. Al, right on time," he said. "Everything is ready for you."

"Are the scrubs here?" I asked.

"In the locker-room as you suggested," Sad McWilliams said glumly. Sad was a rock-'em sock-'em adherent without much faith in laboratory science. Jim had warned me that he might be lukewarm about the androids. I felt certain that a demonstration would make him into a convert, however.

"It wouldn't do to let the goof-squad know they're to scrimmage robots. They might not like it, you know, prejudice and that sort-of thing," I said.

"Quit talking about them and let's see," Big Jim said eagerly.

I nodded assent and brought the communicator-control unit down from the truck's cab. Very carefully I installed it in the red Leland water-way-on. Sad and Dorgan watched noncommittally as I demonstrated the *modus operandi*.

"Each player has a receiver for UHF transmissions that emanated from this control unit. The receiver is built into the radar director in the chest, where it is best protected from shocks and jars," I said. "I would

suggest that a small television camera be built into the field glasses of your pressbox observer so that each player can be aware of the tactical situation at any given moment. It will improve their play, I am sure. A helicopter might be used, but I think the press-box camera will be sufficient—"

"Al, quit stalling around. I want to see the team!" Jim's eyes were bright with anticipation.

"Okay," I said. "They'll respond quite nicely to vocal stimuli but, for the present, we'll use the control unit." I pressed a toggle down and the box hummed. The androids, eleven of them, dropped lightly to the turf and grouped before us in standing football formation. There was a little gasp of shocked admiration from the small group of character-builders surrounding me.

"There they are, gentlemen," I said with pardonable pride. "Please note the fact that I have made each one an individual. No assembly-line techniques are used at the Android Company, definitely no. Painstaking handcraft is our hallmark." I paused for effect. "They are covered with the finest grade of plastiskin available. Tough. Durable. The skeletal structure is of duralumin, and in the center, guards and tackles, this is reinforced with chrome steel. They average 350 pounds in the line and 300 in the backfield. The ends and backs all can run the hundred in seven seconds flat—in full football equipment. Passes are radar-directed and each back can throw a ball one hundred ten yards with complete accuracy.

"A cross-file selection of one hundred plays—assorted passes, buck-laterals, traps and quick-openers is included in the brain-circuit of each. They can be controlled from the box or, in an emergency, can be played fully automatic." I paused for breath

and to appreciate the expression of awe that surrounded me. "I did not bother to include any punt plays, since I considered this unnecessary; however, a modification can be made if you gentlemen deem it necessary."

EVEN IF they were my own handiwork, I must admit they were magnificent specimens. The backs and ends stood six feet six, and the center, guards and tackles six feet five. The quarterback, my special project, could also be used as a computing machine in totaling gate receipts, and he could quote all my favorite poetry.

"I...I don't believe it!" McWilliams gasped. He and Dorgan trotted from man to man, feeling the plastic sinews that bulged under the cardinal football jerseys.

Big Jim clapped me on the back enthusiastically. "Al, boy, I knew you could do it!" he cried, "Leland will be proud of you!"

Tingling in the radiant glow of approbation, I put the team through a quick signal drill. They were precision personified. It was magnificent.

"Bring on the scrubs!" I commanded.

The first play against human opposition showed how things were slated to go. It was a forty-yard breakaway for a touchdown. The conversion was added as a matter of course. The halfback kicked from the quarterback's hold on the forty, and the ball split the uprights cleanly as the scrubs stood about openmouthed and somewhat bruised.

A series of six more plays was run, each resulting in a score.

"That's enough!" McWilliams shouted, "don't tire them!" I smiled at his naivete as the scrubs limped through the tunnel into the locker-room.

I turned the control box over to Sad and Dorgan and let them prac-

tice running the team, and joined Jim on the bench.

"You'll attend to the scholastic angle, Jim. They've all had English A and History of Western Civilization, so I think they can be safely enrolled as sophomores. Privately tutored sophomores."

"Practically done," Jim said, beaming.

"Now, the question of names. I've called each by a name beginning with the first letter of his position. Halloran and Hovec are the halfbacks, Carnofski the center, and so forth. My special one—the team captain, by the way—is Quinby the quarterback."

We turned to watch Quinby pitch a perfect ninety-yard strike to Endsly standing by the south goal posts.

"Wonderful thing, that radar," I said.

Sad brought the team back to the sidelines and gathered them around us in a realistic huddle. "Al," he said with feeling, "look at me. For the first time in twenty years of coaching—I'm smiling." He turned to look fondly at the uniformly handsome faces of the cardinal-shirted robots. "My boys," he said reverently. I was deeply moved.

"Jim," said Sad, "Jim, you can tell the Board of Athletic Control that from this day forward, Leland adheres 100 per cent to the Sanity Code. Subsidization of athletes at Leland is ended. Dorgan, stop the Varsity's salaries and tell them to turn in their suits. We got a team."

FOR THE FEW short weeks that remained before the opening of the football season, I returned to the business of making calculators and dishwashers. The money Jim had paid for the robots tided the Android Company over into a lush pasture of lucrative and engaging contracts. Things were looking up. Even the increasing competition of General Electronics

failed to worry me. I was even willing to admit that—in a coarse way—their products were satisfactory. Their mechanical ditch-digger, though singularly ugly, dug ditches faster than anything had ever dug them before. Mounted on caterpillar tank-treads, it carried four whip-like arms and four different digging tools. It could handle simple commands, too. As a cybernetician, I was willing to give due credit to General Electronics for having come so far without proper guidance.

But the Leland contract put the Android Company in a class by itself. The know-how, and the hundred ten thousand in cash, enabled us to pick and choose assignments. It was a happy time.

In the middle of September Leland played its opening game. Not more than one thousand people had gathered in the great Memorial Stadium that Saturday, and tier on tier of empty seats glared in the bright autumn sunshine. Those few of the faithful who *did* attend, however, saw a game that was to revolutionize the history of the sport.

Milpitas Teacher's College was a tiny school west of Leland, a school unable even to afford a Platoon System. This fact accounted for the even-money odds being quoted on the game by the San Francisco bookies. The city sportswriters all agreed that the game was a toss-up... all, that is, except one Sulky Pressley, whose column, "The Fifty Yard Line," ran daily in the *San Francisco Enquirer*.

Sulky, a rabid Western State red-hot, detested the very name of Leland. For five years—the number of years Western had played in the Rose Bowl—Sulky had been riding high. His prediction for the Leland-Milpitas game was Milpitas by 14 points. It was Sulky who gleefully broke the story about the mass dismissal of last

year's Leland Varsity for scholastic deficiency. One got the impression he was skeptical.

Big Jim, Bronco Dorgan and I sat side by side in the pressbox on the Stadium rim. I must admit I was excited. The whiteclad Milpitas team was on the field, working out. Dorgan was making careful notes on the pad next to his field telephone.

Sulky arrived with a hustle, and waved a derisive greeting to Jim. It was Pressley who had made it his business to see that Jim was placed under abatement by the Conference, and there was no love lost between the two.

"Are your girls showing up today?" Sulky mocked.

"They'll be here," Jim replied confidently.

Sulky was a rotund character, with tiny piggish eyes and a shiny bald head that he generally kept hidden under a battered homberg. He laughed nastily.

"How about a bet on the Big Game, Jamie boy? I was talking to Pop Dee this morning and he says Western's for the Roses again this year. I could use some of your sucker cash."

Jim smiled wolfishly. "Hadn't you better wait until you see our team?" he asked. It was always Standish's philosophy to give a victim enough rope.

"What team?" demanded Pressley sneeringly. "McWilliams canned those dogs you had last year. Who have you got now? The Leland Choral Society?" He laughed hugely at his own club-footed humor. "I got fifty bucks that says Western uses Leland for a doormat again this year."

JIM SHRUGGED. "If you insist. Al, you are a witness."

"Mr. Pressley," I said, "have you any more of that kind of money to risk?"

Pressley looked at me pityingly.

"How many points do you want?" he asked.

"Even. No points."

Pressley turned to his colleagues. "This guy ought to be locked up," he said, "he's either dotty or stiff. Which is it, doc?"

"Neither," I said stiffly. "Put your money where your mouth is, Mr. Pressley."

"I'll bate myself in the morning," he said, "but you're begging it. How much?"

I took a deep breath. "Can you cover five hundred?"

Pressley looked as though he had suddenly discovered gold in his own hackyard. "You're on," he said quickly, and then he added: "Doc, let me tell you something now. Those clowns McWilliams hires couldn't make a first down against Vassar." Well satisfied with his wit, he took his place at the end of the long writers' desk and unpacked his portable typewriter.

One of the writers from the south had been perusing the Leland roster. He looked up in perplexity. "What is this, Dorgan?" he asked, "some kind of gag? You have exactly eleven men listed on your roster."

"That's all we need to make a team, ain't it?" asked Bronco darkly.

"Well, yes, but—"

"So, that's all we got listed." Dorgan returned to his scrutiny of the field.

Jim smiled pleasantly at the puzzled writer. "Leland is de-emphasizing football," he said.

There was a flurry of feeble band-clapping from the half-filled rooting section on the Leland side and from the free kid-section as the red-shirted Leland squad trotted onto the turf. My heart swelled with pride as I watched. Down on the field, Sad McWilliams sat hunched over the water.

"Mighty big horses, Jim," called

one of the writers. "Where did you buy them?"

"I can assure you, gentlemen," said Jim, "that those players do not receive one cent for competing. Leland frowns on such tactics." There was a snort from Sully Pressley.

"I mean it," Jim said, "subsidization is not practiced down here. Those boys are simon-pure, clean-living, *bona fide*, amateur athletes."

I COULD see that the newsmen were not impressed.

Down on the field the two captains met for the toss of the coin. I watched with fatherly concern as Quinby won the choice and elected to receive.

The teams lined up and the referee's whistle sounded. The Milpitas half-back's toe met the ball and it sailed high. Our full-back, Fontleroy, tracked it carefully and gathered it in on the four. He moved swiftly up the center of the gridiron as each robot performed its blocking assignment perfectly. The field was suddenly littered with white-clad players in various ungainly postures on the greensward. Fontleroy ran with blinding speed.

The last Milpitas man left on his feet was the kicker, and he missed a clear shot just as Fontleroy crossed the goal line standing up.

The thousand spectators sat stunned. Presently a ragged cheer went up from the kid-section. The Leland rooting section took it up feebly, and the strains of the Leland Victory March filtered weakly into the afternoon. The bandmen were plainly shaken, and the song was unfamiliar to them.

There was a short time out while a few Milpitas men were removed from the playing field, and Quinby kicked the extra point. Our boys lined up to kick off.

The stillness was thick in the press-box. It was Sully Pressley who spoke at last. He looked a little pale, but he

managed to smile sickly at Jim and me and say: "Fluke."

Carnofski kicked the ball high into the end-zone seats and the Milpitas team, appalled, took possession on their own twenty where they fumbled and Endsly recovered for Leland.

From there on, the game became a little confused. Quinby scored on a quarterback sneak. After the next kick-off, the trembling Milpitas safety man dropped the ball in the end-zone and Hovee recovered. A kickoff and one play later Fontleroy intercepted a wild pass and ran fifty yards to score again. Endsly racked up another on a perfectly thrown pass from Quinby.

The details escape me now, but the first quarter ended with the score 63 to nothing. At half-time, the count was 126 to zero and the Milpitas team was completely demoralized. Their coach was led from the stadium babbling incoherently.

McWilliams took it easy for the last half, and the rest of the afternoon was devoted to kicking field goals from mid-field. The score at the final gun was 156 to nothing, and the newsmen surrounding us were gibbering superlatives. Jim and Dorgan were both shouting congratulations into the field telephone.

Only Pressley was unhappy. He glared malevolently at us as he stomped out of the box, and I knew we'd be hearing from Mr. Pressley. A pundit hates to be wrong. And Sully had been very wrong indeed.

When the crowd had thinned out, Jim pulled me into a corner and pressed my hand warmly. "Al, boy, it's going to be like old times again. The paper boys are yelling All-America, Big time again." His voice shook with emotion. "The Rose Bowl for sure—and the National Championship," he said fervently. "But, Al, you'll have to teach them to punt. I

talked to Sad and he said they wouldn't drop the ball. When the score got over a hundred, he wanted to give Milpitas a chance to score, but they wouldn't drop the ball, boy. It was embarrassing, he said!"

THE NEXT week Leland's Wonder Team—as the friendlier papers had dubbed it—defeated Oregon College of Mines by a score of 112 to nothing, and the week after that West Washington A and M 159 to nothing. Both were Brigade System teams, running in a fresh line after every play, and West Washington was the outfit that first used benzadrine injections before each quarter began.

I was worried about the scores and I called Sad to ask him to please hold them down lest people become suspicious. But Sad was drunk with power and the next week Hollywood College of Arts Sciences and Professions was submerged 170 to nothing.

By this time the Wonder Team was attracting national attention and the AP poll listed Leland fourth, behind Notre Dame, Army and Western State. Carnofski was being touted as the Far Western Conference's best chance for an All-America choice, and even Quinby, Halloran, Hovec and Fontleroy were being considered in spite of the fact that the AA backfield had been selected during the off-season by a caucus of eastern sportswriters.

The game attendance at Leland soared. The Memorial Stadium was enlarged to accommodate 120,000 spectators and still thousands were being turned away each Saturday.

Sulky Pressley continued to snipe at us, and it began to worry me. After the Hollywood A. S. & P. game, he wrote:

"So the annual Big Game approaches to test the durability of the so-called Wonder Team. On the sur-

face, the record of the eleven iron men from Leland is more impressive, but Pop Dec has builded well at Western State and we rather doubt that a squad such as his can be upset by the likes of McWilliams' troops. Pop has the depth to wear the iron men down, and knock Leland off its unfamiliarly high horse...."

And later:

"We suggest that our faithful readers watch The Fifty Yard Line carefully for the next few days. We may have an item of interest concerning the so-called Leland Wonder Team...."

That set me to wondering, all right, and I gave orders to be very careful about letting visitors into The Android Company's plant. We were at work on spare parts for the team, and I didn't want Pressley nosing around.

But I had reckoned without the resourcefulness of the press. One foggy morning I caught a glimpse of one of the workmen coming into the plant. He wore coveralls and carried a lunchpail, but the shape and the shiny bald head tipped me. It was Pressley.

I sounded the security alarm and we turned the plant upside down looking for him without success. The gateman said he had seen a man of his description jump into a car and speed away up the Bayshore highway toward the city. I was sick. I called Jim and told him what had happened. He soothed me and told me to wait and see what came of it. I didn't have to wait long. Pressley had learned plenty.

The morning Enquirer carried "The Fifty Yard Line" on Page One. Sulky wrote:

"We have it on good authority that Commissioner Vic Schroeder has

some interesting questions to ask concerning the Wander Team of Leland University. Questions about eligibility and plenty more. How about it, Jane? Let's have Jim Standish and Sad McWilliams explain their hook-up with the president and general manager of The Android Company. If they don't, The Fifty Yard Line will!"

My hands were shaking as I dialed Jim Standish's number.

"Jim," I said, "Pressley knows! I told you he did! Did you see the Enquirer? They'll tear us to bits, Jim!"

"Take it easy, Al, take it easy. I want you to come down to my office right away. Something has come up. I'll tell you about it when you get here," he said smoothly.

The short hairs on the back of my neck stood erect. "What is it? What's gone wrong?"

"We have been called to the Conference Commissioner's Office, Al. You, me, Sad and Dorgan, and—and Quinby, the quarterback."

THE COMMISSIONER'S Office was on the thirtieth floor of the Holcomb Tower on Post street. It was a huge, panelled affair overlooking Union Square and most of San Francisco. I walked through the anteroom with misgivings. The receptionist recognized me and signalled me through into the inner sanctum. That, I reflected, was a very bad sign.

I had expected a small star-chamber sort of session. Private. Deadly. Instead, the inner office looked like the intersection of Market and Geary. Jim was with me, of course, and McWilliams and Dorgan had arrived ahead of us. Pressley was there, with half a dozen other newsmen. Pop Dee of Western State was there, too, his

immense shape taking up more than his share of the crowded room.

Commissioner Vic Schroeder sat behind his carved desk, watching the milling throng with a sort of confused interest. Pop Dee and Sad were glaring at each other venomously, while Dorgan and Pressley were arguing heatedly. In the corner, humming softly to himself, sat Quinby—his plastic eyes quite blank.

Big Jim took command—as he generally does. "Now that we are all here," he said, "we can get on with it. Sad, will you bring me my briefcase? Thank you." He extracted a thick sheaf of papers and a handbook of the Far Western Conference Rules.

"Mr. Commissioner and gentlemen—" He paused to look disdainfully at Pressley and Pop Dee. "I have here a brief that states Leland University's position on the matter quite plainly. May I consider it filed, Mr. Commissioner?"

Schroeder nodded. "You may."

"Position? Position?" Pressley cried angrily. "What the hell do you mean, position? You've pulled the rawest stunt in the history of American sport and you talk about—"

"Please, Mr. Pressley," Schroeder said, "A little decorum, if you please. This is an official session."

Pressley subsided with a furious snort.

"I have here a copy of the Conference rules," Jim continued, "and nowhere is it stated that a competitor is required to be human—"

Another storm broke. Pressley began shouting and Pop Dee pounded on Schroeder's desk for silence. "That doesn't entitle you to use a team of robots, Standish! Western State won't stand for this! We insist—"

"You," said Sad McWilliams point-

edly, "are in no position to talk. What about doping your men with adrenalin?"

"That," retorted Pop with feeling, "was last season."

"Yeah, last season," Bronco Dorgan snorted. "And this season you're using pinealins and oxygen masks in their helmets. What about it?"

"There is nothing in the rules that says we can't use a little science," Pop said loftily.

"Robots is science," declared Dorgan.

"He has a point there," agreed the Commissioner.

"I protest!" Pressley shouted. "In the name of fair play—"

"Shut up," Dorgan growled.

"Please, Mr. Dorgan," Schroeder said in a hurt voice, "a little decorum."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Big Jim said smoothly. "All this is beside the point. Mr. Pressley and Mr. Dee have accused Leland of violating the Conference rules and the NCAA Sanity Code. I submit that their accusations have no basis in fact and that they should be dismissed forthwith."

"Hold on there!" Pop Dee shouted, red-faced. "I have read the Conference rules, too! So they don't specify players have to be human beings. But they *do* say they have to be *bona fide* students. Don't try and tell me that robot over there is a student at Leland!"

"I am happy you brought that up, Mr. Dee," Jim returned with elaborate courtesy. "I have here Quinby's transcript. Mr. Commissioner, will you accept this in evidence? You will note that Quinby is majoring in Physical Education as is customary with talented athletes."

PRESSLEY began protesting incoherently, but Standish continued

without pause. "Furthermore, Quinby's grades are definitely above average. Three A's and a B. All in order," Jim said with pride.

"You faked that transcript!" howled Pop Dee. "You can't tell me that...that creature is a student!"

"And why not?" Jim asked archly. "He was haulted by the finest cybernetician in the country."

I blushed and shrugged modestly.

"I think," said the Commissioner confusedly, "that if...uh...Mr. Quinby could answer a few questions concerning his scholastic pursuits, the situation might be cleared up. The question now seems to be whether or not...uh...Mr. Quinby is really a student at Leland. As things stand right now, I'm not sure *what* to think."

My heart sank into my shoes.

"Of course, Mr. Commissioner," Big Jim said, "Quinby, come here, please."

The robot arose and walked over to the Commissioner's desk. The crowd in the office drew back with a hush. I knew that Sad hadn't brought the control box, and Quinby was on automatic. My pulse rate rose.

"Uh...Quinby," Schroeder began self-consciously, "will you tell me a little about yourself?"

There was a faint whirring of gears. Relays clicked and the humming grew slightly louder.

"I played no football anywhere before coming to Leland University," Quinby said. "I have three full years of eligibility."

I winced. That was a response I had built into him for replies to inquiring newspapermen.

The Commissioner looked even more confused. "Uh...yes, Quinby, but...uh...what are you studying at Leland?"

I relaxed. We were on firmer ground here.

"PE 120, Advanced Football, Sports Equipment Maintenance, and Medieval English Literature," said the robot.

"Uh...that seems a fair-enough curriculum," Schroeder mumbled vaguely. "Have any of you...uh...gentlemen any questions to put to Mr...uh...Quinby?"

"I got a question!" yelled Pressley. "Damn right I got a question! Let's hear some of this Medieval stuff he's supposed to be studying!"

"Certainly, Mr. Pressley," Jim said. "Quinby?"

The robot struck an attitude.

*Ful wel she song the service
divyne,*

*Entuned in hir nose ful semely;
And Frensh she spak ful faire and
fetisly,*

*After the scole of Stratford atte
Bowe,*

*For the Frensh of Paris was to hir
unknowne,"*

Quinby declaimed.

"Well done, my boy," Jim said.

I beamed. Chaucer was always a favorite of mine.

Schroeder looked completely lost now, and he lit himself a cigar with shaking hands. It was plain to see that Quinby's Chaucer had unnerved him.

Pop Dee and Pressley looked stunned. Finally, Schroeder crumbed out his Havana and said: "I...uh... I am afraid that this may set a dangerous precedent, gentlemen, but I see no way in which Mr...uh.... Quinby can be declared ineligible to compete in the Far Western Conference. He's obviously not subsidized, since he wouldn't have any use for money, and he seems to be a student. The same must be said to apply... uh...on the basis of this test case...

for the rest of the Leland squad."

Pandemonium broke loose. Pop Dee and Pressley began shouting accusations at Schroeder, who was calling futilely for "A little decorum, please!" Jim, Dorgan and Sad all pressed around Quinby, patting the robot on the back. The meeting broke up in a wild flurry of exchanges between the Commissioner and Pressley, with Pop Dee muttering darkly that Western State wouldn't take this lying down, and that we hadn't heard the end of it—not by a long shot.

THE PAPERS played it up big, and mostly unfriendly. Headlines like: LELAND FOOTBALL MACHINES DANGER TO LIFE AND LIMB, and WONDER TEAM JUGGERNAUT DOOMS BRIGADE SYSTEM. The local Football Writer's Association passed a resolution of censure on Vic Schroeder for his decision to let Quinby and company compete. There was talk in Washington of an investigation of the Android Company by both the Finance and the Un-American Committees. Nothing came of it, but it showed how the wind was blowing.

There were rumors that Western State was taking "effective counter-measures" for the coming traditional classic, and several city science editors ran diagrams showing how *window* might be used to jam the Leland radar and huge magnets being set up on the sidelines to trap the steel-boned Leland linemen. Nothing that would work, but it worried me.

The weekend before the Big Game, Leland was to play Midwestern—a Brigade System school that used a fresh team on every play. The biggest scandal of the year broke when the Midwestern squad struck, claiming that they were not paid enough

to risk taking the field against an organization of the power of the Leland University Wonder Team. Mid-western University had to return five hundred thousand dollars in gate receipts, and the Central States Conference had to award Leland the game by the default score of 1 to 0.

The days swept swiftly by and at last Big Game weekend was upon us. Jim and I toured the various class reunions and open-houses, giving short talks about the team and the prospects of post-post-season games against Notre Dame and Army to decide the National Championship.

The fateful Saturday was bright and clear and cold. The November sky had been brushed clean by the wind and the highways leading to Memorial Stadium were jammed. People were arriving at Leland by train, car, helicopter and stratoplane. Over 140,000 people had tickets, some bought at scalpers prices that ranged from \$100.00 a seat in the end-zones to \$500.00 a seat on the fifty-yard line. The third enlargement of the Stadium had been completed, but still there were people standing on the running track and on the turf of the playing field.

The roar that came from the Leland people when the Wonder Team came on the field was deafening. Each move the team made was greeted with cheers.

I listened to the music of the marching bands from my seat on the player's bench. I saw the cardinal flags waving, the students singing. I should have been happy and confident, but I was not. I could not force myself to pay attention to the hundred scantily dressed majorettes. The Western State side of the great bowl was packed, but there was an unnatural silence pervading it that made my blood run cold. There were none of the custom-

ary taunts or chants. Instead, an ominous silence, an anticipatory sullessness that forecast danger to Leland's cause. Ever since the meeting in the Commissioner's office, dark threats had been leaking out of the Western State campus, and the attitude of the Western supporters gave a foreboding reality to them.

I thought vaguely about the wager I had made with Pressley at the Milpitas game, and I swallowed hard. The Android Company was solvent at last, but five hundred dollars is no laughing matter to me.

The PA system announced the names of the eleven Leland robots, and after each there was a thunderous ovation from our side of the oval. There was a pause, and then the stadium announcer began:

"There has been a change announced in the starting line-up for Western State—"

THE REST was drowned out in a triumphant roar from the Western State stands. Pop Dee came out of the tunnel pushing a blue and yellow water wagon. He parked it by the hench and connected a wrist-thick cable to a line coming out of the inner stadium wall.

Then, from the north end tunnel there came the most bizarre procession I have ever seen. Eleven General Electronic ditch-digging mechanicals, daubed with blue and yellow paint, clanked onto the greensward on their tank treads. They had been converted hastily, I could see, by the installation of two mechanical hands at the end of each metal tentacle. I did some quick mental arithmetic. Four arms per player, two hands per arm, and eleven players. Eighty-eight hands. My mouth felt dry.

Sad McWilliams was on his feet, shouting protests at the referee. For

the first time in weeks. Big Jim Standish looked worried. Dorgan just stared in horror. Pop Dee was shouting derisively at us from the bench across the field as the clanking cavalcade spread out across the gridiron.

"They can't do this," Sad was roaring, "it's illegal! It's unsportsmanlike!" He had the referee by the tail of his striped shirt, gesticulating wildly with his free hand. Pop Dee joined in the argument. *

"They're enrolled at Western State, see? Studying Soil Management! And there's nothing you can do about it!" he cried. "Ask wise-guy Standish!"

"They don't even *look* human," moaned Dorgan.

"Dee is right, I'm afraid," the referee agreed. "The Commissioner himself told me that from now on players needn't necessarily be human. But can they understand *me*?"

"They can," Pop said flatly.

"Then on with the game. Clear the field."

Sad walked back toward us like a man in a nightmare. Quinby and one of the ditch-diggers met in the center of the field as the referee tossed the coin. A cheer went up from across the stadium. Western had won the toss and elected to receive the opening kickoff.

The teams lined up. Carnofski ran forward under Dorgan's control. His toe met the ball. It sailed up over the rim of the stadium. I could see Pop Dee hunched over his water-wagon as his machines lined up on the twenty with a new ball.

"First and ten for Western," the announcer said.

A tentacle whipped the ball into play, the halfback grabbed it in eight hands. Tank-treads whirled, heading full power into the center of the line. I closed my eyes. There was a rending crash and the referee's whistle

blew. I opened my eyes again.

The ball was still exactly on the twenty-yard line. The machines unpulled with a tincy sound. A chunk was missing from Endsly's steel skull and a tentacle had been ripped from one of the Western State linemen. It lay twitching on the turf.

"We held 'em," breathed Sad wonderingly.

ON SECOND down the Western quarterback slung a soaring pass downfield. Tréads and cleats ripping up the grass, Hovec and the receiver converged on the ball. They met with an earsplitting racket and the ball exploded between them and dropped to the ground. On third down Carnofski ripped a tank-tread from the Western half-carrier and we were penalized fifteen yards for unnecessary roughness while a mechanic from the far side effected repairs.

Three more running plays failed to gain and Western kicked the ball out of the stadium by means of a lashing tentacle.

Leland took over on the twenty. A pass fell incomplete between two defenders and two receivers. Two thrusts inside tackle failed to gain.

Stalemate.

The crowd began to hoot for action. Pieces of duralumin and plastiskin littered the playing field. Our players were losing their pseudo-humanity in chunks, while the Western State eleven took on the appearance of scrap-metal.

The first quarter ended scoreless and the fans were furious on both sides. Sad and Pop Dee glared at each other across the gridiron in frustration.

By the time the half ended, the once handsome Leland team was a sickening sight. Long stripes of plastiskin hung from the warped and bent skele-

tons. The Western State team looked even worse. Two or three hobbled along on one tread and almost all had at least one tentacle missing. It was horrible. Women fainted in the stands as the teams limped off the turf.

We worked feverishly during halftime to repair our men, but it was a slap-dash job at best. When we returned to the field, Leland alumni moaned and one old lady began protesting that to continue the contest would be cruelty. However, in the best tradition of intercollegiate competition, the officials declared that as long as each team could field eleven players, the game would continue.

The third quarter was a repetition of the first two. Neither team could gain. The fateful fourth quarter began as the shadows began creeping across the mangled field.

There was a hurried consultation around Pop Dee on the other side of the field. I had the feeling that something was about to happen—something dirty.

The lurching ditch-diggers were in possession of the ball on their own forty when an end-run began. No progress was made forward—in fact, I had the feeling that none was attempted. The mechanical with the ball, three teammates running interference, thundered toward us. Dorgan roared a warning and we scattered. The spectators screamed. There was a sound like an explosion in a drum factory.

I dragged myself to my feet just in time to see the wreckage of the red Leland water-wagon being driven into the grass by the treads of two ditch-diggers. Big Jim howled with fury and Sad dived for the mangled control box in a futile effort to save it.

It was hopeless. The box was a shambles, dripping its entrails of wire,

shattered tubes, and relays.

"He did that on purpose," sobbed Dorgan shaking a fist at Pop Dee. "They planned it!"

Quickly, the Western team lined up. Our robots stood around in confusion. The hall was snapped and a clattering ditch-digger carried it fifty yards to score. The stadium went wild. For the first time, the Wonder Team had given up a touchdown.

"The power!" I yelled to Jim, "the power! Turn it off!"

Jim caught my meaning and vanished. He had seen what I had—that Pop Dee's control unit operated on a power line from under the stands.

THE TEAMS lined up. Ours sluggishly, for they were on their own—each robot operating automatically and independently. But they were built well, and a machine does what it is made to do—come hell or high water. I had built the Wonder Team to play football, and they played—with or without Sad McWilliams' control.

The announcer cut through the uproar to say that Western would kick off to Leland. The diggers rumbled forward and the ball sailed deep into our end-zone. Quinby caught it. Fumbled it. Caught it again as the crowd shrieked. He started up the field, zig-zagging as his teammates missed blocking assignments. The Western mechanicals converged on him. Again I closed my eyes. I was fond of that robot, and I couldn't bear to witness what was about to happen to him as tons of steel closed in on him.

There was no sound—only the frenzied howling of the crowd. I looked between my spread fingers and my heart leaped. The diggers stood frozen in various attitudes about the field, and Quinby was crossing the goal line

at an easy lope. Jim had cut off Pop's power.

A raging crew of mechanics raced onto the field to switch the diggers onto automatic as the extra point was kicked to tie the score.

Now the game began to roughen. Freed of control, the robots crashed each other viciously on every play. The referee's whistle shrilled unheard. The umpire tried to take the ball away from Halloran and three robots and two diggers chased him off the field. This terrified the referee, and he scampered for the sidelines as Hovec and a digger clattered in his direction.

The spectators took fright and began crowding back into the stands. The people farther up, feeling the press of those below, began scrambling for the exits. Some idiot screamed that the robots were going mad and the stampede began in earnest. The Leland band struck up the Star Spangled Banner, but the panic was too far gone. People began spilling out over the stadium rim, climbing down the walls, babbling with fright.

We tried to stop the tide, but Jim, Sad, Dorgan and I were all carried along on a wave of terrified humanity. On the field behind us, the robots were still playing football, unconscious of the mob hysteria that raged around them.

As we reached the exit, still fighting to get back, we caught sight of Pop Dee. He called to us for help, and together we fought our way out of the kicking, biting, pushing melee. We were almost in the clear when

Sulky Pressley, clothes torn and eyes bright with terror, spotted us.

"There they are!" he shrieked. "They're the ones who started this! Lynch them!"

Others took up the cry. "Lynch them! Get a rope!"

We fled. Jim led us to his car, and we jumped in, one jump ahead of the mob. Horn blasting, we careened through the quiet streets of Leland and out onto the Bayside Highway, heading south. We didn't stop running until we got to Fresno, ninety miles away.

I'll never forget our hotel room there. The bottles, the camaraderie. Pop and Sad arm in arm. Jim and Dorgan and I talking freely. One thing we all agreed upon. As far as we were concerned, we'd seen our last football game.

SO YOU SEE, in spite of what's been said and written about The Android Company and the Big Game Riot, I don't feel we were really responsible. We had to hide out a few weeks, of course, and Sad and Pop are looking for work. But I claim we gave the fans what they'd been asking for for years. We were *deus ex machina*, like I said.

That five-hundred-dollar bet with Sulky is off, I guess. We still don't know how the game will turn out. The robots are still playing, you see. I don't quite know who's going to stop them, either. It's a cinch I'm never going to set foot in a football stadium again.

I ask you—would you?

THE END

CARBON

A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

By
June Lurie

WITH THE COMING of nuclear physics, the age-old dream of alchemists, the production of synthetic elements, was realized. But plain old chemistry has nurtured as long a hope, and in spite of many false starts it appears that this dream, too, may come true. The dream is the creation of artificial diamonds!

Back in the late half of the nineteenth century, the famous French scientist Henri Moissan, inventor of the electric arc furnace, devoted a good portion of his efforts to making synthetic diamonds—with questionable success. His method was to take a crucible of molten iron and dissolve as much graphite (lead-pencil carbon) as the iron would hold. The crucible would be heated in the arc furnace just short of the vaporization point of the iron. Then it would be thrown into a bath of ice-cold water. The theory of the operation was that the suddenly chilled iron, cooled to a solid, would contract and, like a super-cooled liquid, reject some of its dissolved carbon. And this carbon, released in a free state, would be squeezed and compressed so strongly that it would literally be undergoing the same pressures and forces that natural diamonds underwent when they were formed eons ago in the cooling Earth's crust.

The iron was then leached away with an acid. The residue consisted of particles of carbon—and possibly small diamonds—though this has not been repeated with any success.

Recently a much less drastic technique has been devised by the Bell Telephone Labs which brings us a step closer to synthetic-diamond manufacture. It consists simply of heating an organic compound. The residue, after the volatiles have been driven off, is a type of carbon skin to diamond—extremely hard and capable of being used for polishing, glass-cutting and other operations which a diamond performs so admirably. No known material is as hard as a diamond, but this synthetic stuff comes close to it. Perhaps further research will enable the knotty problem to be licked and then diamonds won't be "a girl's best friend".

INTERSTELLAR HOT BOX

By
Jack Winter

STUDIES OF the Crab nebula in the constellation of Taurus indicate that this collection of stars contains the hottest known bodies in the universe. Some of the stars, whose major energy blasts occur in the ultraviolet region, attain temperatures, as measured on our Earthly Centigrade scale, of hundreds of thousands of degrees! One star is listed at 650,000 degrees!

Actually it is somewhat of an error to use the expression "temperature" for the condition which the stars exhibit, since it really doesn't describe the furious energy ejection which takes place. Under such conditions the stars no longer exhibit the properties of what we regard as matter.

Such stars are essentially gases, gases of almost pure neutronium, matter stripped of electrons and consisting of protons reacting violently with neutrons. They are worlds of perpetually existing atomic bombs!

In a telescope, such nebular systems appear quite brilliant. But the eye does not see one one-hundredth of their real brilliance for, since the major part of the radiation is in the ultraviolet to which the eye is not sensitive, only the photographic plate can capture the intensity of the energy loss.

These stars are not so much material things as they are collections of various gases, much more tenuous than many an Earthly vacuum system. This still does not prevent them from being powerful energy states, beyond anything we know of.

In spite of the fact that some believe the day will come when it will be possible to reach the stars, it is a certainty that men will be content with telescopic and spectroscopic observation of those stellar systems, because they contain nothing remotely hospitable to men. Planetary systems simply cannot exist. Even stars, as we ordinarily think of them, do not exist. Clearly, men are not going to visit clouds of radiant gases! The usefulness of the study of these "hottest" stars really lies, not in considering them as "stellar bells", but rather in thinking of them as gigantic and informative atomic laboratories!



THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

A YOUNG friend of mine who worries because his I.Q. is only one hundred and twenty-five got me cornered the other evening. He had a big book under his arm—the kind with pages twelve by fourteen inches, and a cover that is supposed to be a masterpiece of bookbinding. He had paid twelve dollars for it. It was a work on the development of art, delving into modern art.

I was forced to take a gander at some of it. And that's what I did. Take a gander. There were two examples of impressionism in pure form. I had to admit that they were excellent designs for linoleum, or maybe even wallpaper. Not the kind I would buy, but the kind maybe someone would buy. And there were other illustrations that impressed me as being crude attempts at art by people who had no talent for it.

Meanwhile this friend of mine was keeping up a one-sided dialogue, impressing upon me the fact that the artists were good artists, and that what I should look for was the message or mood the paintings created. I should look at the paintings and let them sink in.

I looked at them from that standpoint. There were one or two nudes with blocky disjointed limbs, etc., etc., that gave me the impression the artist bated women. There was another that made me think of mad, disjointed thoughts rushing through the tortured subconscious of a starving artist. There was a portrait of a lady that gave me the impression the artist was

not only drunk, but had mislaid his glasses as well.

My friend started telling me about one artist whose works could never be reproduced in a book like this twelve-dollar one, because they had no form at all. This artist would buy a blank canvas. For two weeks he would just stare at it, not touching it with a brush. Then he would paint the whole canvas green, and stare at it another two weeks. Then he would paint it blue over the green, and study it some more. Maybe when he got done the last coat of paint would be white. At first glance it would just look like a canvas painted white. Then, my friend went on to explain, a certain mood would creep over you. You would stare at the white canvas with growing fascination, trying to pin down what was causing the strange effect on you. The brush strokes? Whatever it was, it was definitely there, and this artist was a genius.

It's a definite movement. It exists in what is called modern poetry. Symbolism, impressionism, divorced from conventionality. You take something like, "Firbly shurbly gurbly mah! Skittle kewhittle belittle go duh". What is it? I dunno. I just created it and haven't analyzed it yet. It's a product of my subconscious. I don't even know if it's modern poetry yet. I'd have to get an expert's opinion on that.

But since it's definitely a product of my subconscious, it must have been produced by unconscious psychological

factors, and therefore have analyzable sense to it.

Sometimes I think modern politics and international diplomacy are of the same school. Speaking of politics, I was driving along the coast highway the other day. A brand-new stretch of highway. Four years ago it wasn't there. Now there were dozens of cars speeding over it at fifty to seventy miles an hour.

If I had a time machine and were to stop there, and go ahead in time a hundred years, would I see the same highway, cars speeding over it? How about a million years from now, or a billion?

The startling thought came to me: what if, a billion years from now, that highway is still there, and cars are speeding along it? That is a distinctly original science-fiction idea. I doubt if anyone ever thought of it before.

Think of the implications contained in it. The first atom bomb a billion years in the remote past. A stretch of paved highway kept in good condition for a billion continuous years, forty million successive generations of people driving over it.

It's an absurd concept, isn't it? Too fantastic. It won't happen.

Okay, we'll take its opposite. Sometime during the next billion years a last car is going to speed over that stretch of highway. I'm not talking about temporary suspension of travel for repairs, or abandonment of that stretch for a new route. I'm talking about the last car to cover that stretch of highway—forever. Ahead of it are other cars. Behind it are no cars at all, or if there is one, it will never make it.

What happens? Since this is a real highway, and it will be a real car and not just fiction, *when* will it happen? Will the driver know he's the

last? Will he be wondering if he can make it, or will he be driving along, unsuspecting?

If there were a time-travel machine so we could go to that point in time, and watch, it would be a dramatic moment, with all the past building up to it, and all the future stemming from it.

It would fit a pattern that we have grown to accept as the universal pattern, even though we seldom think of it. You, who are reading this right now, will someday wake up for the last time, get dressed, and begin your day.

Whatever your job right now, someday you will spend your last day on that job. The car you're driving—you will one day step on the starter for the last time. The motor will cough into life. You will slip in the clutch and pull away from the curb...

That is the pattern.

* * *

A month ago Rick Sneary of the Outlander Society dropped in for a brief moment to ask Mari if she would write something for their fanzine. She would. Five hours later it was done, and Rick took it with him. It's "I Was In Love With a Silliconoid". A space True Confession. While Rick was waiting for it he interviewed me, and took the interview on a wire recorder. Both items are in the current outlander, which you can get by sending 15c to Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif. Quite a few other items in it, too. That's the February number. Mari is an Outlander. When we got married a year and a half ago there was some discussion as to what that made me. It was settled by making me an Outlander-in-law, or Outlaw, for short. The Outlanders make up a fan club whose members must be living near but not in Los Angeles proper when they join. Some of them move away later, but remain Outlanders. There's one living in Scotland at present.

The fanzine pile is rather thick this month. New ones appearing every month. I'm continually amazed at the incredible amount of work fans go to to bring out these fanzines—and expense. If you think a quarter for a fanzine is high, try publishing one like it. You'll never make money, and more likely you'll lose money.

A fan editor knows this ahead of time and expects it. All he hopes for is that his zine will prove popular enough to bring in enough subscriptions to cut down the loss to what he can afford.

* * *

DESTINY: 20c; Malcolm Willis, 11848 S.E. Powell Blvd., Portland 66, Oregon. A four-by-six photo-offset job much like the old *Fanscient* Don Day used to publish. Thirty-two pages, with a department titled "Who's Who in Science Fiction", featuring August Derleth this time.

Most interesting to me, however, was the article on Lynn Hickman, who started the very popular fan organization known as the Little Monsters. Lynn is a farm-machinery salesman by trade, and a very active fan and collector. Also a nice-looking fellow from his picture. Twenty-five years old. "The Temple of Destiny", a story by Andrew Duane, is tops.

Darrell C. Richardson is author of an article, "The Father of John Carter and Tarzan". Dr. Richardson has one of the most complete collections of stf in existence, and is a prolific writer of short biographies.

A generous distribution of artwork and photos makes this a professionally done fanzine. You'll enjoy it.

* * *

PACIFIC ROCKET SOCIETY BULLETIN: no price listed. For information concerning the PRS write to Pacific Rocket Society, Box 3056, Van Nuys, Calif. First time I've received their bulletin, and it's well worth getting. Interesting articles on all sorts of things connected with rocketry. It should be, with eight people on the staff.

The PRS holds meetings every week, has a large membership attending the meetings, and occasionally sets off rockets at its proving grounds out in the desert. On page one in the PRS Calendar, August 2, 3, are the tentative dates for SRV full-scale static testing, for example, and July 12-13 are dates for work trip to test second stage of SRV. Looks like the real stuff to me.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; James V. Tauras, 137-43 32nd Ave., Flushing 64, New York. Twice a month. A newsmag that brings you the latest news, and has been in continuous publication for several years. Eleven, to be exact. On page one this time I see pictures with familiar faces. Charles Dye, Sam Moskowitz, and others, in the reports on the Fan-Vet convention. A hundred and fifty attended.

On page three is an announcement by Ray Palmer titled "The Shaver Mystery is Dead". The drawing of Ray is atrocious.

The article is mostly quotes from Ray to the effect that Dick Shaver will henceforth write straight science-fiction. He always has written straight science-fiction, and some of it is the best in the field. After all, what is science-fiction? If it is good it could be true, and might be true. Maybe some of it is true. "The Face in the Abyss," by A. Merritt, still makes me believe it's true when I read it.

Dozens of other items in this newsmag. If you send for it you'll get the habit, and keep on subscribing. It's that good.

* * *

QUANDRY: no. 20; 15c; Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga. One of the most interesting fanzines, currently. Lance leads off this issue with an article telling you how you can get the government to subsidize your fanzine. His article is factual and accurate. If you're a fanzine editor you should read it and take advantage of it.

J.T. Oliver has a well-written review of Wilson Tucker's book, "The Long Loud Silence," (Rinehart), scheduled for summer or fall.

"The Man Who Cannot Die" is a story. Lee says its author wants his name withheld. He wants the reaction of fandom to his story. I read it.

The letter column has letters from hmf's. I gather from one of them that Bob Tucker started a send-a-brick-to-Chicago chain letter or something. Object of the bricks is to build a permanent convention building. An interesting fantasy. Wonder how much it would cost to mail a brick?

* * *

ORB: 35c; Bob Johnson, 1005 E. 60th St., Chicago 37, Ill. And it probably cost him all of that per copy to publish it. It's terrific. It has, for example, a farce in one act by Fritz Leiber, Judith Merril, and Fred Brown, titled, "The Robot, The Girl, The Android, and The Poet".

There are thirty pages, and in addition there's a litho print of a fantasy drawing suitable for framing. As I skim through it I'm impressed by the fact that each page is a work of art by itself.

For those of you who would like some pictures of the convention at New Orleans last year there are two pages of them, as good as real snapshots—and the photo-offset process makes them just that.

* * *

PEON: 15c; free to overseas fans and members of the U. S. Armed Forces; Charles Lee Riddle, PNCA, U.S. Navy Underwater Sound Laboratory, Fort Trumbull, New London, Conn. He used to be stationed in Hawaii. He dropped in to see me on his way to his new post. A very likeable guy, with a wife and two

or three children, and a hobby of publishing *Peon*.

I have to tell you about the most wonderful hit of deadpan humor in this issue. A perfectly "straight" letter attacking those who claim there is no stf in Russia. It sounds genuine until its author starts describing various Soviet stf stories. "Trouble on Titan" deals with the thrilling adventures of a young lady tractor driver who goes to Titan to establish a collective farm among the natives; "Kolchos in the Stars" concerns the adventures of a young lady tractor driver....

* * *

OPUS 4: no price listed; W. Max Keasler, 420 S. 11th, Poplar Bluff, Mo. One of the best examples of what I have come to regard as a real fanzine. Mimeographed, with lots of artwork, and pages of different colors. Something new is small snapshots of various fans pasted in. Max says that will be a permanent feature of *Opus*. This issue seems to consist mostly of the letter section, which Max endivens with editing and humorous illos. The Number 12 instalment of "All Our Yesterdays", by Harry Warner Jr., gives a history of the National Fantasy Fan Federation, or NFFF. Roger Dard's "Fantasy in Film" discusses filmdom's current trend toward more stf films, and brings up the fact that Hollywood has brought out many fantasy and stf films, such as "King Kong", "The Invisible Man", etc. Marion Bradley conducts the fanzine reviews.

* * *

OOPSLA: 3/30c; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. In the editorial there seems to be some discussion about the way of choosing next year's site for the big convention. Some seem to think more fans should have a voice in the matter. The way it's done at present is for those who attend the convention to vote on it, after those who want it have stated their case.

My own opinion is that the present set-up is the best, because it takes in those who actually attend the convention, and the vote is for a city with actual representatives there—and thus interested enough to go through with all the work and planning. Nothing could end the annual conventions more quickly than for the next con to be assigned to some person or group who will drop out and say nothing, and leave everything hanging.

Several nice stories in this issue. And "Dear Alice" by Shelby is a regular feature that is always highly entertaining.

* * *

JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society; sample copy free on request. After that it's 30c, or \$2.75 a year. The May issue

leads off with James P. Elliott's "Interplanetary Communications and Navigation," with an analysis of radar and its limits, ship-to-ship communication in space, and many other facets of this problem.

Michael Conley's "A Method of Landing a Space Ship Under Adverse Climatic Conditions" is the second article. There's also a book review, and of course the regular feature "Rocket Abstracts", which is brief and pertinent information gleaned from dozens of current technical journals of interest to stfans and rocket men.

And a one-page report on the last meeting. If you live in or near Chicago you should attend one of their meetings, Room 518, Roosevelt College, 440 S. Michigan Blvd.

I see I forgot to list their mailing address. R's Gertrude Jurachak, 2970 No. Sheridan Rd., Chicago, Ill.

* * *

ETRON: 25c; first issue; Chuck Taylor, 1521 Mars, Lakewood 7, Ohio. A really giant fanzine with fifty pages of mimeography that is so expertly done it may have been done by a professional. Four stories and seven articles. The articles are fascinating. "H Bomb Theory," by Boh Evans, Jr., "A Machine Using Earth's Magnetic Field For Propulsion," or "Classification Problem". Also three articles on flying saucers!

If Chuck can keep his coming issues as high in quality of contents and neatness of mimeography he won't need to worry. He can if you give him a boost by sending for a copy.

* * *

VIEWS IN SF: 10c; Baltimore Science Fiction Forum bulletin; 802 W. 35th St., Baltimore 11, Maryland. Many short articles by many people. A lot of them are book reviews and prozine reviews, and show intelligent comprehension and analysis. Judging from the way the members of BSFF got together in their fanzine, it should be a swell club to belong to. If you are in or near Baltimore get in touch with them. Even if you don't live near Baltimore, you can get this interesting and alive fanzine.

Herbert Kushner, in "Two Views on Future Man and Future Government" analyses two views elaborated in stf. The first is the politically unified planet. The second is the adult race, not needing elaborate and unified government. Both, at present, are Utopias we can't attain. At least in my opinion they are. But on a small scale, as in a democratic fan club that meets every week, they can be attained very easily, and be quite enjoyable.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST HANDBOOK: Capt. K. F. Slater, (RPC), No. 28 PCLU

Detachment, BAOR 29 (c/o G.P.O. England). This is part of a package subscription including *Operation Foxtest*, the fanzine.

The handbook is a general information index to world fandom, containing information about fanzines, fan clubs, fans, and all the intricacies of fandom. In addition there is information on how to send items from one country to another, including instructions about money exchange.

To show how complete it is, I just looked up its American representative. He's Philip J. Rasch, 567 Erskine Dr., Pacific Palisades, Calif. So he's the one to write to to get this handbook. There's even a dictionary of fan terms and expressions!

* * *

CURRENT SCIENCE-FICTION: weekly; 15c, 2/25; Ron Friedman, Box 1329, Grand Central station, New York 17, N.Y. Most interesting feature is, "Things You Miss in the Papers," by Hal Shapiro and Alice Douglas. Although I read several newspapers every day I had missed most of the items they used this time.

This zine stresses current news about fan-club activities all over the country. For you who are interested in this phase of fandom this zine will fill a real need.

STARLANES: 16c; Orma McCormick, 1558 W. Hazelhurst St., Ferndale 20, Mich. Starlanes announces a science-fiction cookbook! It's being published by Caldwell E. Reid, P.O. Box 349, Magnolia, Miss. It should be both humorous and instructive.

Orma's fanzine stresses poetry. I'm a Pogo fan, myself, but there are quite a few of you poetry enthusiasts in fandom, so send for her zine—and send her some of your better poems, too.

* * *

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN: Official organ of NFFF, the largest fan organization. Dues, I believe, are a dollar a year, and that dollar brings you many things, including friends to welcome you into fandom and see you have a good time. For information write to Stuart S. Hoffman, Box 13, Black Earth, Wisconsin, or Eva Firestone, Upton, Wyoming.

Included in this issue is a blank for voting on best fan, best fan editor, best pro author, best prozine, best artist, etc. And there's a complete list of members with addresses, which makes this issue quite bulky. Kaymar Carlson is once

again President. Last year it was Rick Sneyry.

* * *

APPROACH TO INFINITY: 30c; Roy Squires, 1745 Kenneth Rd., Glendale 1, Calif., who is editor of *fantasy advertiser*, one of the finest and most widely circulated fanzines today. *Approach to Infinity* is not a fanzine, but a collection of science-fiction and fantasy artwork by Morris Scott Dollens who, in my opinion, is one of the finest of modern sf artists, using a technique that combines photography and sketching. There is an awe-inspiring vastness to many of his works that few other artists whose works I've seen have attained. And in this rare collection you get fourteen of his very best, in expensive half-tones.

While you're at it, ask for a sample copy of *fantasy advertiser*, if you aren't already a subscriber. It's primarily an adzine, with everything from single books or magazines to whole collections offered for sale or trade. But it also contains some of the finest of articles to be found in fandom, written well enough to have found ready sale in professional markets.

* * *

By the time this is in print the convention at Chicago will be in the past.

I'm wondering where it will be in 1953? My guess is Philadelphia. Regardless of that, a lot of you will have attended the Chicago convention, and met Hugo Gernsback, father of Science Fiction.

You will also have met dozens of people you have been wanting to meet for a long time.

Probably I will have been there, though my private astrologist warns me I'm due for a serious accident about then!

I hope I was able to attend, and with my wife, Mari Wolf, renew old friendships with many of you, and begin friendships with many more of you.

So, until the next CLUB HOUSE...

—ROG PHILLIPS

UTOPIA - WHERE NOBODY WORKS



"AUTOMATION" IS a word coined by the machine-makers, the factory men, and the practical "do-ers" to describe the process known to science-fiction people as "robotization". There once was a time when, if you wanted a picture of the future, you looked into science fiction and had it described for you. Today all you have to do is pick up one of the technical journals and the future leaps out at you.

Consider "automation", for example. This word, implying the complete robotization of a factory, is used to describe recent events at one of the world's largest motormakers. In Cleveland, Ohio, a manufacturer has constructed a factory designed to turn out engine blocks completely automatically.

Transfer machines and automatic machinery are no novelty in industry. Everyone has seen pictures of the gigantic metal-working machines which drill and cut and ream and bore without a single human touch. But, until the automation of this robot factory, the interim process involving the handling of materials, the moving of parts into and out of the machines, was still a manual, or at least semimanual, process. Not so in this motor block factory.

The conveyor lines are completely robotized. That is, the motor blocks are fastened to carriages which run along to the machines, which are in turn driven and controlled from a central point. Hundreds of manufacturing operations are done on the blocks. Hundreds of handling operations are involved with the blocks. All of this is done without human aid, except for the input on the factory and and the outtake!

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of this step. It is recognition by American industry of the fact that the future will belong to the organization with the closest approximation of robotics.

It is interesting to note that the productivity of this motor-block factory is twice as great as that of a similar factory partially run with human labor for materials-handling. Furthermore, the costs of operation are less. In only one way is the

automatic factory more complicated and difficult to maintain. Obviously, with such a closely intermeshed and complex linkage, if anything goes wrong the whole works is thrown out of kilter. As a result two things are done. First, maintenance is accomplished in extraordinary detail. Every machine and part is checked and double-checked, with recording meters indicating the slightest variations in setup. Also, a record is kept of the tool and machine life. Secondly, a staff is available to supplement or replace a broken-down component, should one exist. That is, temporarily, humans can be thrown into the breach should an automatic machine go out. Then, after repair, things are immediately back to normal. The factory is operating and the managers are amazed and pleased with the way things are working out. There is no question that "automation" is here to stay!

—By Leland Wing

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THE READER'S FORUM



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Sir:

I have been a reader of **AMAZING STORIES** since 1938 and have always enjoyed every issue. Occasionally a poor story finds its way into your "mag", but there are usually enough good ones to compensate.

It is amazing the fuss some people make about covers and trimmed edges as if it affects the value of the story.

Personally, I buy your (or should I say "our" mag) strictly for the stories and do not care much if the covers are on or off, whether they feature nudes, BEMs, or anything else, though I think they should illustrate some of the stories.

I have read most of the American and British science-fiction mags and **AMAZING** tops them all every time.

In your July issue I read Frederic Booth's article "The Last of the Saucers", in which he stated that the Naval Research Labs released the information that the saucers were Radiosonde balloons.

Early last year a saucer was sighted over Kente City in British Guiana and a little later one was sighted at night by three prominent citizens of our West Coast.

One of these persons I know to be a person who would not tell a lie to deceive anybody. How come saucers over British Guiana? What was a Radiosonde balloon doing over Chile last year masquerading as a saucer? Did the U.S. have any Radiosonde balloons over Norway in 1947? Why is it that none of these Radiosonde balloons or "saucers" has ever been found by civilians anywhere? Is it possible for the same type of Radiosonde balloons mistaken for saucers over Mexico, Norway, Chile, British Guiana and the U.S. to be seen over Russia? I guess the research labs must have released an awful lot of balloons to cover such places as Germany, where a saucer was tracked by radar, and such places as Japan, Holland, Greece and Yugoslavia. Could a Radiosonde balloon pass through a canyon at high-enough speed to whip the tops off trees? Was Captain Mantell killed over Godman Field chasing Radiosonde balloons? What about aerial objects sighted all over the world at various times before the advent of Radiosonde balloons, objects described in vari-

ous books and papers by people of high standing as aerial ships and that even before aircraft were invented on earth. I would advise Mr. Booth to study well the reports accumulated over the centuries before dismissing the saucers lightly as mass hallucinations, hysteria, Radiosonde balloons or human nature.

Why is it so difficult to believe that there could be other beings who might have solved the secret of space travel?

When one thinks about our own planet and how little we still know about it how can we presume to say what is and what is not possible in outer space?

Maybe the reason why the saucer story is not being released to the public is because of fear—fear of what it might do to the well-ordered scheme of things as they are now.

The Orson Welles broadcast was a splendid example of what could happen if the news is sprung too suddenly.

I have never before written to **AMAZING STORIES** and I trust that this, my first letter, may be published in the Reader's Forum.

I am desirous of taking up the saucer issue with anyone who may care to write me and will answer promptly any fans interested in corresponding with me on science fiction, radio, photography and the Hawaiian guitar.

Albert L. Chandra
"D" Hogg Street
Allouaytown
Georgetown, Demerara
South America

HIS FAVORITE MAG? NATCH!

Dear Howard:

Well, I just got the August issue of my favorite magazine, **AMAZING STORIES**, and as yet I haven't read any of the stories. I can't read the lead story, anyhow, because I still don't have the March issue (hint, hint), so I can read the first Flannigan story (I have the second). But I have read the Observatory. WOW! I almost dropped dead— "FANTASTIC bi-monthly, color on the inside". Oh, boy! Keep it up, boy—that's all I ask!

Now—my viewpoint on the readers' viewpoint:

James Lyles—what's your phone number?

Mike Stebbins—I hope to see one of your stories in print. I agree with you on the illustrations in the May issue.

Dick Lupoff—I agree with you 200%.

Larry Touzinsky—I love you, because you love Milton Lesser—my very favorite author.

Charlie Greene—In my opinion, Virgil Finlay is the greatest artist that ever lived.

Ken Welsh—you BEM—Milton Lesser is the best!

Danny Saefer—Boy! Have you got a lot of nerve! I like to compare the readers' comments with my own, and I think the Reader's Forum is good.

Howard Browne—I'm a little peeved with you! Why don't you answer all of the questions you are asked? There were a few very good questions from the readers that I would have liked to hear answers to!

Now—glancing back through the issue: The cover—very good, but not excellent. Inside: Blue—1st Finlay; 2nd Beecham; 3rd Emsler; 4th Llewellyn.

Oh, yes! Why don't we see or hear from L. E. Shaffer or Paul W. Fairman? All we do is see their names. Why don't they write any articles, etc.?

Well, I have to go now.

Alfred Perez
3116 1/2 Harrison Street
Oakland 11, California

P. S: Fans, I have a lot of mystery pocket books for sale or trade—write to me for list and prices.

BACK NUMBERS FOR MR. COE

Dear Mr. Browne:

I sincerely hope this letter (or at least part of it) will eventually reach print in your magazine AMAZING STORIES for the reason I shall state immediately. I WANT BACK ISSUES OF AMAZING STORIES AND FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. I would greatly appreciate it if only this request and my name and address were printed. This would then leave more room for interesting letters such as: "The word 'freable' was misspelled on page 256 in the July ish," and "...why can't we have trimmed edges in this mag," or "I'm afraid to venture into the daylight carrying a magazine with such a lewd and lascivious cover..." Pardon me, I lost my head.

If anyone would like to sell their old issues of AS and FA prior to 1947 (I am assuming that this letter is printed) please write to me enclosing in your letter a list of the mags and prices. I will accept any reasonable price.

There! I've had my say, and now it is up to you, Mr. Browne. To print or not to print. That is the question.

Frank Coe
8549 Remick Avenue
Sun Valley, California



the
boy
who
grew
up
in a
house
full
of
manless
women

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MY SISTER AND I had to wait over fifty years because it could not be made public until all the actors in the great drama had passed away.

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WOES OF A COLLECTOR

Dear Editor:

I have been buying science-fiction magazines for several years, and I felt that I must write to you to say that I think AS tops all the other magazines in that field. I enjoy all the stories. If I must state a preference for any particular story I give my vote to one you published some time ago—"Journey to Barant". I liked it because it was so much fun. I chuckled over it so loudly that my small daughter was convinced that I was laying an egg!

I have never written to any editor before, and I don't suppose I would have written now, because I am a naturally lazy letter-writer, if I didn't have another reason. Let me explain. We recently moved house and as a result I have no place to board (that's what my husband calls it!) all my sf mags, of which I have accumulated more than 200 copies. So I must dispose of them. If any of your readers are interested, all of my copies are in excellent condition, many are new, and I will sell them at the price of ten for a dollar (buyer paying postage) in batches of ten or more. I would be really grateful for your help in disposing of them.

I. Halliday
215 Harlandale Avenue
Willowdale, Ontario, Canada

Your price seems more than fair to us, Mr. Halliday. We're sure you'll dispose of your magazines. —Ed.

A SOLID VOTE FOR THE CLUB HOUSE

Dear Mr. Browne:

Picked up the September issue of AMAZING at the newsstand last night, and after reading the first two stories, I thought it necessary to drop you a line of congratulations. To me it seems impossible to come out month after month with the best in sf, but AMAZING STORIES does it month after month.

In looking over the Reader's Forum, it seems that there is some individual that considers himself higher than the rest of us lowly humans. Well, it takes all kinds to make up the world, and he sure takes the cake.

I imagine Mr. Hinton will appreciate the non-sexy cover on the September issue. Just as long as you keep up the good stories, I don't care if you have a nude girl standing on a corner passing out AMAZING, "The Girl Who Loved Death" and "The Flight of the Vampires" were both highly enjoyable.

As I have not finished the entire issue I cannot attempt to rate the stories, but if the rest are as good as the first two stories, it's going to be a job to pick out the best. I am against cutting out or cutting down Reg Phillips' Club House. In fact it

is perfect just the way it is. I rather enjoy the so-called "personal" editorials Reg writes. I am in favor of a fanzine review in every sf magazine. I like reading fanzines and find it interesting to see what the pros' opinions of different fanzines are.

Yours for a bigger and better AS,
Larry Touzinsky
2911 Minnesota Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri

We promise you, Mr. Touzinsky, we'll keep up the good stories. —Ed.

THESE GENTLEMEN DISSENT

Dear Mr. Browne:

After reading the letter which explains the mystery of the flying saucers (September 1952 issue) we find that it, while very interesting in many respects, leaves something to be desired in the way of authenticity. We find it hard to refer to this individual because, for obvious reasons, he did not sign his name. For equally obvious reasons he took great pains, he claims, to prevent the location of his residence. Therefore, for simplicity's sake, we shall refer to him here as Mr. Dis Gruntled.

We have found that throughout his letter Mr. Gruntled seems to have used immeasurable quantities to prove the reality of nonexistent objects. To refute Mr. Gruntled's letter from a scientific point of view is indeed a difficult, perhaps well-nigh impossible, task; his letter is an illogical mass of nonscientific ambiguities. Nevertheless we of the lowly race of humans cannot allow this thrust at our collective mentalities and integrities to go unanswered. Therefore, we shall have to reduce ourselves temporarily to Mr. Gruntled's plane of existence.

In the first place, Mr. Gruntled states without reservation that only two planets are inhabited. This information, obviously secured from the saucerites, does not set any specific limits; therefore we must conclude that it includes the entire universe. We are to believe, then, that Mr. Gruntled's friends have explored, in minute detail, every planet that exists within the bounds of our unfathomable (as yet) universe. Then we must remember that these saucerites undoubtedly have likewise explored their own extradimensional universe with the same amount of precision. These must be busy little beings, indeed.

Due to the attenuated nature of matter in this x dimension that Mr. Gruntled's little men have emerged from, these beings evidently increase in size from their given three feet here to the eight feet Mr. Gruntled stated was their size in saucerland. That means an increase of about three times their size here. Naturally, then, Mr. Gruntled, in making the cross-log, will have to do likewise. If he is a normal-size individual, he will have in-

erased from approximately six feet tall and eight inches thick to the rather large proportions of eighteen feet tall and two feet in thickness, his total mass, of course, remaining the same. Fancy that. As we see it, either Mr. Gruntled will have to accumulate a considerable quantity of extra protoplasm, or assume the density of whipped cream.

Mr. Grantled has very cleverly operated on a perfectly good television set, adding a few super-whatnots known only to the Secret Saucer Society of three, thus enabling him to receive communications from his little men. However, he has informed us that he will not build a transmitter, necessary for a two-way conversation, because the government "would get nossey". Yet he has failed to explain why the government hasn't got "nossey" about the strange waves emanating from the flying saucers. Perhaps they even emanate from the x dimension. In any case, however, we suppose the reason Mr. Grantled would give is that these waves are undetectable to any but the Secret Saucer Society, The Privileged Three. But then, how is it that the government could detect the waves emanating from Mr. Grantled? Certainly Grantled the Great, with his genius for altering television sets, could design a transmitter that would operate on the same undetectable frequency as the Sacerdotes' set.

Throughout Mr. Gruntled's letter we detected a note of new approach to the old basis for the creed of the Anti-Vivisectionists. Could it be that Mr. Gruntled objects to the use of animals in experiments designed to improve the outlook for mankind? We guess so. He has evinced a strong dislike for mankind all along. But then, could he have been laboring under a delusion in referring to our television-outalter as a Mr.? Perhaps this creature is a Mrs. or a Miss. Then again, it may be a dog. Maybe slightly above average in intelligence, but a dog just the same. That would explain the Anti-Vivisectionism. Or perhaps it wishes to be a dog, and therefore objects to the "mistreatment" of same. Who knows?

So you are going to Sauterland, Mr. Gruntled? Well, we hope you have a happy trip to your new home.

O let us laugh at the lines above,
Less precious than pearls and rubies—
Telling the people what they already
know.

That you, Gruntled, are a boob.

Sincerely,

J. Andre Cadieux
Richard G. Peterson
4928 Washburn Ave. So.
Minneapolis 19, Minnesota

FROM A HISTORIAN

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I am writing "A History of Science Fiction" in collaboration with a well-known

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pro-editor, and for that reason would like to complete my collection of reference material, especially in the line of rarities.

For one thing, I would like to buy copies of all fan magazines ever published. This isn't really an impossible task, since I do have a tremendous background of "fan-zines" numbering several thousand, beginning with the very earliest in 1930.

I would like information on several elusive stories, supposed to have been published about thirty years ago. I say, "supposed to have been", because I've never read any specific information as to their whereabouts. Two of these particular titles are "The Betelgeuse Express" and "Within the Earth-Atom", the latter supposed to have been a four-part serial.

Among the rarities needed for our sets are certain copies of the BLACK CAT Magazine, first year WEIRD TALES, large-size issues of the THRILL BOOK (or any other issues, in fact, since they could be used for trading purposes), the January 1930 issue of ASTOUNDING STORIES, and the two issues of MIRACLE SCIENCE and FANTASY STORIES.

We're only interested in mint copies of the ASTOUNDING and MIRACLE STORIES, having in mind a reproduction of their covers.

You would be doing us a great service by featuring this in your Reader's Forum.
Larry B. Farsace
187 North Union Street
Rochester 5, New York

We're pretty sure that many of our readers will remember the stories referred to above. —Ed.

NOBODY LOVES MR. ANONYMOUS

Dear Mr. Browne:

Yep, time for my monthly report on your monthly effort. And how nice: the cover illustrated an actual scene in the cover story! Walter Popp gets better and better.

Rog Phillips had a good story in "Adam's First Wife". That illo by Finlay was fine, too.

Aha! In the letter section—another flying saucer testimonial! Too bad he (or she) didn't sign his, her, its name. He'd probably be deluged with mail.

I can picture the "poor soul" in some sanatorium wondering where his three-foot pals went. Of course, on the other hand, it could be true! But, Howard, why "no comment"? That could have been a fine opportunity for an editorial blast to top 'em all.

Ray Thompson
425 North Thirteenth
Salina, Kansas

No comment. —Ed.

COLLECTOR'S ITEMS?

Dear Editor:

Lack of space is forcing me to sell

approximately 300 science-fiction and fantasy magazines. I have made a price of 30c each, post-paid, regardless of age, rarity, or original price. All are in excellent condition. A stamped, self-addressed envelope will bring a list.

Does anyone want to sell the following issues of AMAZING STORIES: January 1932, with "Tumithak of the Corridors", and February, March and April 1932, with "Troyana", at a reasonable price?

Helen Hirst
Twin Fins Handcraft
Route 5, Box 1191
Vancouver, Washington

A FINLAY FAN

Dear Ed:

I just found out about science fiction several months ago, and I'm hooked. I have many of the different mags and have found AS the best, in my opinion, that I have read.

Thanks for the much-appreciated sequel to "The Golden Gods". Bloodstone is tops in my estimation.

I would like to see more illos by Finlay. He's tops. I don't know what he does to his drawings, but they sure stand out.

I have quite a few assorted mags I would like to swap for back issues, that is, from December '51 back.

Congrats on the new mag FANTASTIC. Not bad for a first. I hope the color illos turn out okay.

Robert D. MacDonald
Route 2, Box 103
Lenoir City, Tennessee

R OF M F WAS BEST

Dear Mr. Browne:

After having read "Land Beyond the Lens" and "The Golden Gods", "surely no story could top these". Thanks for making me a bar. Want an opinion? You got one—"Return of Michael Flannigan" surpassed the first two in the series, though by but a slim margin.

Incidentally, how about making another flar outta me... please. Give the details on FA's folding—it isn't true, is it? Do color interiors for FANTASTIC cost that much? On the subject of color interiors, Fred Brown, the one with no "e", had a character in his book "What Mad Universe" called Doppelberg, who wanted color illos. It's about time they're a reality! If you can do it, fine and all power to you—but not if the color is higher or lower than the illustration. Who likes lipstick on the middle of the nose? On the mag, that is.

D'ya know, those "history writers of the future" must have a partnership with optometrists. Between the story and those blasted footnotes I'm getting a specialized course in eye exercise.

Ralph Shouts
2100 Post Street #14
San Francisco 15, California

HOW OLD IS

FATHER TIME ?

By Don Morrow

ESTIMATES on the age of the universe are more numerous among astronomers than fleas on a goat. Guesses are made in terms of a contracting universe, an expanding universe, or an oscillating universe. To date none of these estimates has proved absolute—in fact, none has proved even "good".

Recently, the well-known astronomer Professor Fritz Zwicky called for a re-examination of the whole subject. He proposes a systematic attack on determining the age of the known universe, that sphere of space three hundred million light years in radius. The method he suggests is quite logical and requires the use of the two hundred inch 'scope.

First, stars and galaxies near us are to be catalogued and studied for their basic characteristics, such as brightness, size, color and distribution. Then, a similar survey is to be made of the remotest stars and galaxies we can observe. Then a comparison is to be made of these two groups. By selecting those qualities which correspond and those which differ, and by noting the velocities and speeds of the stellar groups, a pretty good idea of the age of our known universe should be obtained.

Unfortunately, beyond this we cannot go. The two hundred inch 'scope can only reach so far into the depths of space; that is, even with the longest photographic exposure, with the most sensitive bolometers, we are confined to this three hundred million light year sphere. What lies beyond that distance? A diminution in density of stars and galaxies seems to take place, suggesting that the universe does "taper off" a bit and this is the true universe. But we can't really know that. Perhaps beyond that radius the density increases once more, perhaps not.

And there the matter rests. Until instrumentation provides more data, we are restricted to this enormous though limited amount of space. Maybe when we get 'scopes and observatories mounted on the Moon, the frontiers of the universe will be pushed out another hundred million light years because of the lack of atmospheric interference. Then we'll know whether or not space is bounded!



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VEST POCKET UNIVERSE

By Howard Eisen

IN AN AGE of super-galactic epics, where rocketeers flit from one galactic system to another as easily as jumping from one room to another, the true picture of the Universe is completely lost. Sometimes it is hard for a science-fictioneer to get his bearings and to come back to reality, the reality of the vastness of our own Solar System, which in itself is impressive enough without resorting to interstellar considerations. We've so talked ourselves into thinking of the Solar System as a dot in space that we forget that everything is relative and that actually it is enormous by our present standards—someday this may change, but for now let's think in Solar terms; after all we haven't even gotten to the Moon!

Those models of the Solar System which use a convenient scale, such as the Sun-Earth distance equalling a foot, are very effective for the outer planets that show up in distances measured in tens of feet (Pluto, for example, being forty feet away on that scale).

The point is that the Solar System is vast, an enormous volume of space which we shudder to contemplate. Our insignificance can only be borne to us by considering a Martian or a Jovian or a Saturnian rocket flight. In terms of rockets which we can project in our imagination, flights to these planets will take from portions of a year to years to complete! We can't "flit" back and forth. We can only crawl. Put yourself in the position of the man making the first Jovian flight, let's say. Juppiter is four hundred and eighty-four million miles from the Sun! Conceive of what a trip to the satellites of that planet would be like! It staggers the imagination.

Trajectories for such flights have been worked out by astronomers already taking into account everything they know of hypothetical rockets and space flight. The periods for such trips amount to years. Even Solar flight, it can be seen, isn't an overnight matter!

Thus when you come back to a reasonable frame of reference, you are forced to stand in awesome admiration of the vastness of the Solar System. There is no need to worry about interstellar flight. Unless the "space-warps" of the *s-f* writers attain realization a lot sooner than we think, our space travel will be confined to the Solar System and that will be a big enough problem!

X RAY — PRIME KILLER

By Lincoln Warren

X RAYS HAVE been recognized as very lethal little bundles of energy ever since their discovery fifty-three years ago. The early experimenters learned this the hard way, by burns and skin diseases which appeared when they exposed themselves too casually to this "wonder-light". Subsequently safety measures were taken, and today the X-ray, as used in dentistry, shoe-fitting and in industrial applications, is treated with familiarity and absence of fear.

But the recent work in atomic energy has shown that X-radiation is far more dangerous than has hitherto been assumed, and that it is time to reexamine the whole problem, since it can mean much for the future.

An amazing fact, perhaps, is that during a dental X-ray, the patient receives more lethal radiation than a worker in an atomic-energy plant receives in a year! And it is the business of atomic-energy workers to play it safe, for radiation troubles are cumulative, and frequent dosage extending over years may do irreparable damage. Doctors, recognizing this, are beginning to be more cautious in their requests for X-rays of patients. Some attention is being paid the past history of the patient. How long and how often has he been exposed to X-rays? Has his dosage exceeded the tolerances for this year? Is there any sign of X-ray burn anywhere?

Because it is not always possible to tell how often a patient has been exposed, doctors must prescribe X-radiation with some hesitancy. The X-ray is a marvelous scientific aid to diagnosis, since it enables men to peer through flesh and bone; but X-rays are lethal, too.

A case in point is the incident of the girls who, back in 1922, painted watch faces with radium paint, and have died (or are slowly dying) of poisoning from minute amounts of radium absorbed from brush tips which they wet with tongues and lips, as painters frequently do. The lethal element in the problem was of course X-radiation from the radium. X-rays are killers; be careful of them!

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ATOM JUICE

By

Ralph Cox

IT IS A sad commentary on our times that secrecy must be so carefully preserved in the inner sancta of the atomic laboratories. Unfortunately, the political state of the world demands it. If only we were privileged to peek behind the "iron curtain" of nuclear physics. What miracles might be unfolded!

We can take this optimistic attitude because, recently, two facts were disclosed which suggest that fantastic progress is being made toward the use of atomic energy for peace-time purposes. If you count the propulsion of submarines by atomic energy, then, really, three disclosures have been made.

The first is the British release concerning the heating of a large office building with an atomic pile. In Harwell, Britain's atomic-energy center, a heat-exchanging system connecting with a radioactive atomic pile is furnishing the steam heat for a large heating system in one of the administrative buildings. This is encouraging.

The second lot of information released concerns the construction of a hundred-kilowatt electric-power plant at Arco, Idaho. The plant utilizes some sort of molten metal—it might be bismuth, cadmium or mercury—which transfers the heat from the atomic pile to the boilers of a rather conventional power plant for generating electricity. A one-hundred-kilowatt plant is not large by urban standards but it is still a respectable power-producer. The AEC makes it clear that the major intention of this plant is not so much the production of electricity as such, as the ability to "boiled" or produce more fissionable material than the plant consumes, necessarily one of the major problems to be solved before atomic energy can be utilized on a nation-wide scale.

If the AEC goes so far as to release that much information, you may be sure that the advances are much greater than that. Information always lags behind achievement in secret matters like this.

In connection with the startling success of British and American atomic achievement, it is interesting to note that several European scientific organizations are combining to build suitable research facilities in atomic energy, primarily because they realize that a great number of European scientists, trained there, are leaving for the enormous laboratory facilities of Britain and America. The result is that Europe is suffering a very serious shortage of physicists. And the only reason is that Europe doesn't have the labs to hold them.

(continued from second cover)

five exams, she got around to the desk. She read her way through the contents, piled most of the manuscripts into a carton slated for the storage-closet floor and, without saying a word to me, mailed the five re-

maining stories to five different magazines. It would not be charitable of me to mention here what I said to her when I found out. Especially since I had to apologize later—when all five stories sold!

And so, incredibly enough has everything I've found time to write since.



A. J. Kedzie

I HAPPEN to be what most people exclaim over as a "strange" combination. By profession I'm an artist. And a successful one, I modestly add. My sculptures have been exhibited in leading museums throughout the country—and my painting has earned me a very good livelihood.

But I also have a hobby. Science, and science fiction. I don't consider myself much of a challenge to Shakespeare—but I enjoy being able to write these fact articles—and enjoy even more being able to sell them. If my readers will continue to feel the same way, then we can stay in business.



Carter J. Wainwright

FROM THE point of view of plot, mine is a pretty trite story. It's the one about the middle-aged man who finds himself suddenly faced with serious illness and a staggering family tragedy, with the prognosis for recovery from either decidedly doubtful. There are two courses open to him: to succumb quietly, or to look for the "new interest" that may prove a panacea. I chose the latter.

Writing—light verse for trade publications, sports articles for children's magazines, fact pieces for science and science-fiction books—has brought me a livelihood—and a new life.

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